THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

Callahan and the Wheelies
STEPHEN BARR

AUGUST 40¢

ROBERT F. YOUNG

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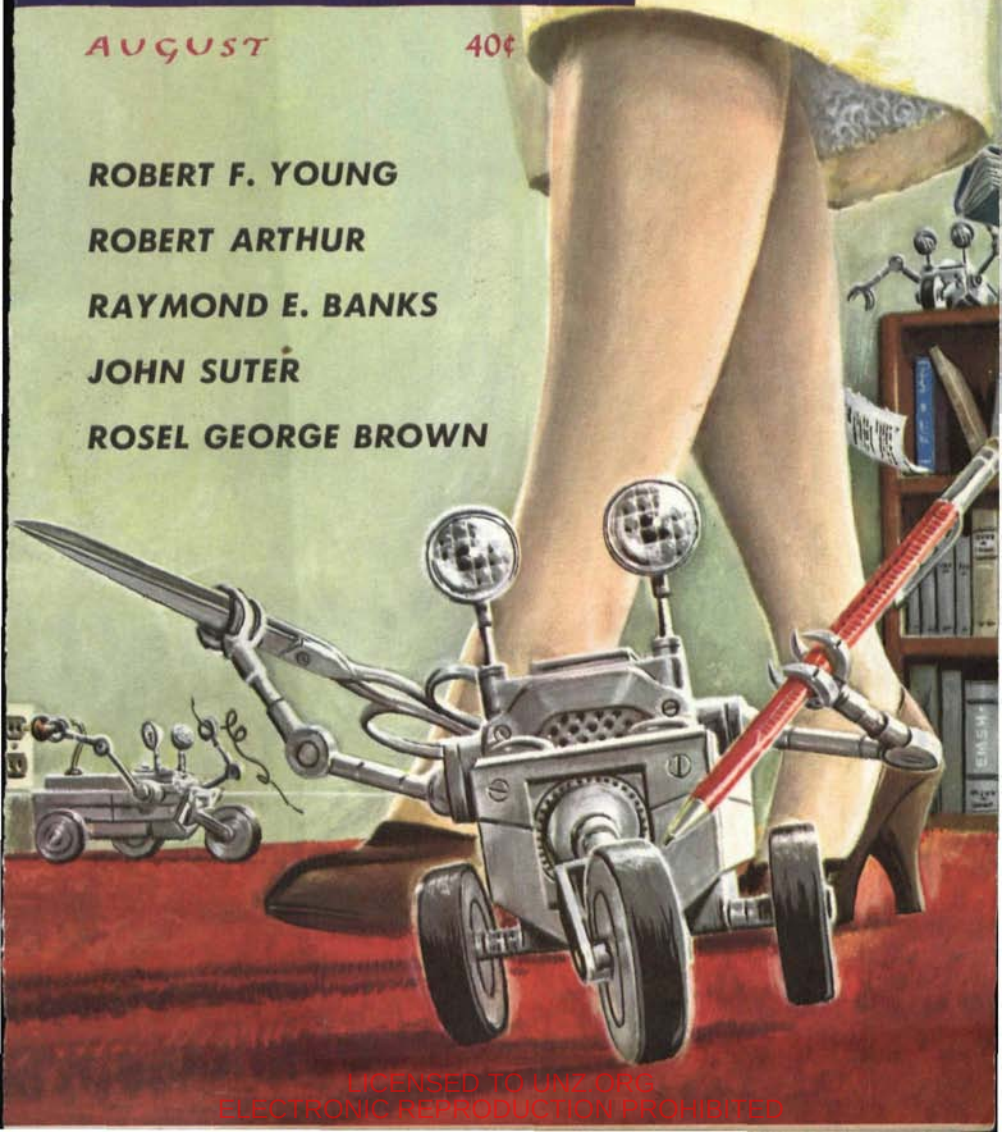
RAYMOND E. BANKS

JOHN SUTER

ROSEL GEORGE BROWN



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Fantasy and Science Fiction

AUGUST *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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In this issue . . .

The other day we came across a new drink called *Lord and Lady* (1 ounce of Lord Calvert and ½ ounce of Cointreau, served as a liqueur, or on the rocks), and it suddenly occurred to us that no writer in the field has done for potables what, for example, Cleve Cartmill did for the atom bomb (at least not to our knowledge). References, of course, to the spicy blue wines of Sirius, and that sort of thing—but no truly constructive thinking about soul-replenishing successors to extra-dry martinis, cold beer, warming whiskey. We thought of offering free subscriptions for the best inventions along these lines, quickly decided that the task of judging would very likely be incapacitating as far as getting out future issues of the magazine was concerned. We urge you all to think about it, however—as the hero of this month's lead story knew, standing still is the worst kind of death. . . .

Another thing you might think about, in generous moments, is stories of fantasy and science fiction that you have particularly liked, and which have not appeared in fantasy or science fiction magazines. Many of the reprints we have used were tracked down as the result of readers' suggestions; we are extremely grateful for tips, and would be most pleased to have more.

Coming next month . . .

Last May's *Science* column, "A Piece of Pi," drew an astonishing number of letters—with the result that The Good Doctor returns next month with "Tools of the Trade," in which he considers some of the points brought up by astute readers, and offers more points of his own. . . .

An example of F&SF's policy of service: one day recently we received two letters requesting a story based on Project Ozma; in the same mail, we received "The Word to Space," by Winston P. Sanders, answering the requests. It, too, will be along next month, together with an unusual novelet—"Goodbye," by Burton Raffel —and many other good things.

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Robert F. Young has written of the out-sized before—remember "Goddess in Granite" and "To Fell a Tree"? This time, he goes back a bit, and tells a moving tale of how a particular Brobdingnagian manifestation came into being. It casts, too, another light on a subject looked into by Theodore Sturgeon in last year's F&SF story, "The Man Who Lost the Sea." (Incidentally, if you missed that particularly rewarding example of Sturgeon's work both here and in our annual anthology, THE BEST FROM F&SF, NINTH SERIES, *you will find it in this year's Martha Foley collection,* THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES 1960.) *In short, Mr. Young writes both sensitively, and big.*

NIKITA EISENHOWER JONES

by Robert F. Young

NEAR THE SOUTHERN FRINGE of Pluto's Great Ice Plain there is a range of mountains which resembles a Brobdingnagian man lying upon his back, staring eternally up at the stars. It begins with a lofty mesa, the prominences of which, when seen against the brooding star-specked sky, suggest a silhouetted profile. A brief ridge, comparable to a massive neck, leads to the range proper, the first great swell of which is easily identifiable as the upper section of a vast chest; then the range proper levels off for a hundred miles, drops gradually into a stomach-like plateau, and bifurcates finally into two thigh-like ridges, both of which terminate, some two hundred miles farther on, into almost identical foot-like tors.

When the range is viewed from above—say from a height of about three hundred miles—the illusion is even stronger. Looking down you see an anthropomorphic formation of peaks and crevices and chimneys, of rocks and snow and ice. Two relatively smaller ranges, stretching out at near right-angles on either side of the mother-range, bring to mind outflung arms, and at the extremity of each is a deposit of moraine startlingly suggestive of a human hand. The

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face is an elusive pattern of shadows that changes subtly with each fitful play of starlight.

Now Pluto, as every schoolboy knows, is not a mountainous planet. It has, to be sure, interminable stretches of ice-clad hills that conceivably could have been mountains—a hundred thousand Plutonian years ago. There are even, in the polar regions, eminences high enough to pass for frustrated foothills. In the region of the Great Ice Plain, however—with the glaring exception of the mountains in question—there is nothing but an endless succession of eroded ice-ridges, souvenirs, no doubt, of the long-ago age when the wind still blew and the snow still fell. So it is odd to a degree that makes even mentioning the fact redundant that on a planet where the geology was not generally conducive to mountains that mountains should exist in a region where it was not conducive to them at all.

What planetary stress created the Brobdingnagian Mountains, or whatever they really are (if they *are* anything besides a massive upheaval of rocks and ice) constitutes a mystery that will probably never be resolved. But any mystery that can foster stories—be they legends or fairy tales, or both—has not endured in vain. The Brobdingnagian Mountains have fostered at least a hundred such stories, and you have merely to choose the one you think throws the most light upon their true origin. I am a romantic myself, and I prefer the romantic version—the one retired spacemen tell over their drinks-too-many in every spaceport bar from Alpha Centauri 4 to Betelgeuse 29. It is a true story, up to a point; whether it is true or not beyond that point is a question I am not qualified to answer.

You can judge best for yourself.

He had corkscrew hair and he was as black as space and his smile was as wide as the world. At the age of twelve he was five feet one—and five feet one was all he was ever going to be. He had the broad nose and the sloping forehead usually associated with his race; but in the almost feminine line of his lips there was a hint of sensitivity, and deep in his dark-brown eyes the latent tinder of intelligence awaited the right combination of flint and steel to bring it to life. His name was Nikita Eisenhower Jones.

Malaita, the island of his birth, had been the last of the Solomons to accept the white man's civilization. Now his people raised cucumbers and beans as well as yams and *kumara,* and collected comic-books instead of heads. They still lived in the bush, but they gave their children white men's names and sent them to the British mission schools along the coast and

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wore dresses and slacks instead of lava-lavas and spoke English instead of *bêche-de-mer*.

In the schools the children learned among other things that the world was round, that it was one of nine planets orbiting the sun, that the sun was a star and that there were a zillion others roughly similar to it in the cosmos; that God had created the whole works and that old Kuvi-Kavi, who lived back in the bush and preached a different version of Genesis, was a liar of the first magnitude. But the children went right on listening to old Kuvi-Kavi's version anyway. Not that they had anything against the white man's version: it was just that old Kuvi-Kavi's packed a harder punch.

It went something like this:

In the beginning the world was water and the sky was without light. There were two gods—Kamikau, the rain god, and Murabongu, the sea god—and they hated each other cordially. Finally Kamikau got sick of riding around in the dark sky on his lonely rain cloud and caused land to emerge from the sea and caused cocoanut trees and yams and sweet-potatoes to grow upon the land. From an armful of darkness and two cat's-eye shells he created the First Mary and brought her to life by blowing his breath into her mouth. Then he built the First Fire, and there was light and warmth. Meanwhile, Murabongu, the sea god, had become angry over the invasion of his domain, and now he emerged from the deeps to do battle with Kamikau. For ages the two gods battled in the light of the First Fire, while the First Mary watched from the scrub. At last the sea god tired and Kamikau was able to subdue him. He cut off Murabongu's head and cooked the rest of him over the First Fire, and he and the First Mary sat down to the First Feast. When they finished eating, Kamikau picked up the head and flung it high into the sky where it became the moon. Next he picked up the heart of the First Fire and flung it even higher into the sky where it became the sun. Finally he scattered the members throughout the heavens where they became the stars. Not long afterward the first man was born of god and woman, and nineteenth and twentieth-century ambassadors of civilization were assured of a good crop of native laborers, and twenty-first century exponents of western culture were provided with an excellent market for used comic-books.

Nikita Eisenhower Jones was thirteen years old when a space-comic first swam into his ken. It was like Keats first looking into Chapman's Homer. The round gaily-colored planets and the sleek ships plying the immensities between them did something to his

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Melanesian soul that had never been done to it before, and he knew that henceforth he would never be the same again. Marrying a Mary and settling down in a vine-covered grass-hut in the bush and raising yams and sweet potatoes and pickaninnies and working forty hours a week in the copra factory might be enough for his fellows, but it was not enough for him. He wanted the stars.

The space-comic was the first of many. Obtaining them was no problem—by this time there were more comic-books on the island than there were cocoanuts—and as the mission schools had long since given up assigning homework to their lackadaisical pupils, he had plenty of time to read. Space-comics, however, were far from being ideal nourishment for a burgeoning young mind such as Nick's, and the time came when they failed utterly either to satisfy his curiosity or to titillate his imagination, whereupon he began visiting the mission-school library and availing himself of its limited supply of space-books. Most of them were outdated and did not go beyond the first satellite-launchings, but one of them dealt with the first Russian expedition to the moon, and reading it, his ambition was kindled anew. Once upon a time, Malaita had represented the whole universe in his mind: now it shrank beneath his feet to a mere speck of land, and planets of every size and color whirled dizzily round his head.

The mission-schools covered only the elementary grades, and most of the islanders dropped out before completing them. But not Nick. The books he had read had done more than ignite his imagination: they had ignited the latent intellectual tinder, too, and the blaze that ensued greedily consumed every branch of knowledge he could lay his hands on. He shone forth like a nova among his schoolmates in every endeavor save one: like them, he was utterly incapable of pronouncing the letter "X" and whenever he said words such as "six" and "fix," they came out "sikkis" and "fikkis."

Noting his enthusiasm, and his marks, the headmaster urged him to take advantage of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate's new educational program, under which any eligible Solomon Islander could pursue his studies, expenses paid, in either the United States or Great Britain. Nick did so, and passed the eligibility examination without trouble. He chose the United States because of its more active role in the space race, and a few months later found himself in the Big Rock Candy Country.

By the time he graduated from high school he had managed to become a citizen. This automatically disqualified him for any further aid from the BSIP, but he had de-

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cided that being a permanent resident of the United States would be to his advantage in carrying out his plans. His next step was to apply for admittance to the Von Braun Space Academy. His size had already caused him considerable discomfiture in high school—the average American male now stood six feet two in his stocking feet—but he had not dreamed it would be a detriment to his becoming a spaceman. On the contrary, he had thought it would stand him in good stead. Theoretically, he was right; practically, he was not. The public wanted heroes for its tax dollars, and the public's conception of a hero had not deviated one iota from the moment Matt Dillon had first stalked down the cathodic streets of Dodge and shot up the first of a long line of drunks, card sharps, gunmen, ne'er-do-wells and sadomasochists. To be a hero, you had to be tall. You had to be big. You had to be handsome. Above all, you had to be a father-figure. Small wonder, then, that when Nikita Eisenhower Jones applied for admission to the Academy he was laughed out the door.

But there are more ways of getting into space than becoming a pilot or an astronaut. This was not true in the beginning, of course, but by this time there were U.S. bases on Ganymede, the third moon of Jupiter, and on Miranda, the fifth moon of Uranus, and bases require personnel. In his Melanesian heart Nick knew that next to a well-filled wallet, the one thing white men cherish most is a well-filled stomach. So he became a cook. Not a good cook. Not even an excellent cook. But a superb cook. When he put in his application at the Planet Exploratory Agency—the joint civilian-military project that had superseded the Civilian Space Agency—and gave a demonstration of his prowess, he was laughed at, but he wasn't laughed out the door, and some months later PEA assigned him to the Miranda base where, it was rumored, the most significant leap of all was about to take place—i.e. the Pluto shot.

According to section 20 of the Interplanetary Code set up by the U.N. in the latter part of the twentieth century, the first nation to plant its flag on a planet (said operation to be performed by human, rather than robotic, hands) could automatically claim that planet and all its satellites. In the case of a satellite, the entire planetary system could be claimed—with the exception, of course, of the Earth-moon system. The Soviet Union had long since planted its flag on the moon, and had followed the planting with the establishment of a huge moon base. After the code was set up, the United States pulled a coup by bypassing the moon, Mars and the asteroid belt, and planting its flag

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and setting up a base on Ganymede, thereby gaining title to the Jovian system. A Russian planting and base on Enceladus, the second moon of Saturn, soon followed, and was followed in turn by a U.S. planting and base on Miranda. Strategically speaking, the Miranda base was the most valuable one of all, because the Uranian system, while it was the seventh from the sun, marked the approximate halfway point between Earth and Pluto—or would, when opposition took place—and while Pluto, owing to the plane of the ecliptic, did not bring the nearer stars appreciably closer, the nation that reached it first would be the psychological winner of the solar-system race.

The Miranda base, Nikita Eisenhower Jones decided, was not precisely what he had had in mind on that distant day when he had laid aside the space-comic and gazed up through the foliage of a banyan tree at a suddenly expanded sky. It was enclosed by a huge transparent pressure dome, and consisted of the oxygen-producing plant, the machine shop, the living quarters, the kitchen-dining-room-bar and the supply building. At one point on the perimeter of the dome stood the air-tight tower, and several hundred yards from the tower, the *Starhope* pointed its proud nose at the brooding star-specked sky.

But the base was only partially responsible for his lack of enthusiasm. Most of it accrued from the sense of frustration that overcame him whenever he gazed through the roof of the dome at the stars. He had experienced the sense first when he had seen the huge mass of Jupiter in the viewport of the shuttle-ship, and he had experienced it again—more poignantly this time—when he had glimpsed be-ringed Saturn, silvery and magnificent, against the black backdrop of the immensities. And whenever Miranda's rotation brought awesome Uranus into view, the sense was so overwhelming that he had to turn his eyes away. He did not understand the reason for his frustration, but one thing he did understand: being a part of the conquest of space was not enough—

He had to be the conqueror.

His day began at 0300 hours when he arose to prepare the morning meal. At 0600 hours, when his work in the kitchen was caught up, he joined the maintenance crew in the *Starhope* in the unofficial capacity of water boy, handing and fetching them tools and materials, good-naturedly smiling at their constant jokes about his height, and religiously watching every move they made. At 1100 hours he returned to the kitchen and prepared the noon meal, and at 1400 hours he rejoined the maintenance crew and

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handed, fetched, smiled and watched till 1700 hours. The evening meal was at 1830 hours. Generally it took him an hour to clean up afterwards, and you'd have thought by then that his day would be done. But it wasn't. There were still his duties as bartender to be fulfilled.

The bar was strictly a morale item. The base was supplied with enough whiskey to permit each member of the crew to have two shots per night; but even if there had been no liquor available, the bar would have been a popular gathering place in view of the fact that the next nearest one was over a billion and a half miles away. To bring it into being, Nick simply folded up the aluminum chairs and piled them in one corner of the dining room, then he elevated the eating table to a height of three feet and aligned it with the nearest wall, leaving enough space behind it for him to walk back and forth. Finally he went out to the kitchen, unlocked the liquor chest and brought in the evening's ration.

In addition to Nick, there were fourteen men stationed at the base: Colonel Dennison, the commanding officer; the eight-man base maintenance crew; the four-man ship's maintenance crew; and Captain Cohill, the pilot of the *Starhope*. Two of the men—Blake and Barnaby—were teetotalers, and enjoyed a phenomenal popularity with the others, especially Captain Cohill. The way everybody hung around them and did them favors, you'd have thought they were a pair of pretty girls instead of a pair of burly grease-monkeys. It was obvious from the start, though, that Captain Cohill had the inside track so far as their affections were concerned, and when, not long before the Great Event was scheduled to take place, he promised them souvenirs from Pluto's landscape if and when he came back, the others didn't stand a chance, and dropped out one by one.

Colonel Dennison usually spent the evening standing at the end of the bar, and Captain Cohill had a system all worked out for his benefit. First he would hang around Blake, his back to the colonel, and Blake would order his two shots in a double-shot glass. Not long afterwards, the two of them would leave, and the double-shot glass would be sitting there on the bar, drained to the last drop. Half an hour or so later, Captain Cohill would come in with Barnaby, and the procedure would be repeated. Finally Cohill would come in just before closing time—usually after everyone else had left—and order his own ration. By the time he finished drinking it he was ready—if not willing—to go to bed.

He struck up a warm friendship with Nick right from the start,

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calling him Keeper of the Golden Keys, Noble Bushman with the Heart of Gold, and King Solomon of the Spaceways, as the mood suited him, cautioning Nick never to reveal his duplicity to Colonel Dennison. Nick had a warm smile reserved just for him, and the two of them had many a pleasant conversation on the Captain's third visitation each evening. They were never at a loss for something to talk about: Captain Cohill's reminiscences about his various girl friends would have sufficed in themselves to keep the barroom bright with conversational cheer, and in addition to his reminiscences there were Nikita's endless questions about the *Starhope,* the physique of which Captain Cohill knew almost as thoroughly as he did the physiques of his girl friends.

Nick's curiosity about the ship was insatiable. "Big fella ship belong you," he said one night (he invariably employed *bêche-de-mer* when conversing with the men because he knew instinctively that it would be nothing in his favor for them to know he could speak English—with the exception of pronouncing his "X's"—better than they could. "Big fella ship," he said, "you push'm up how?"

Cohill swirled—or tried to swirl—the final dram of rye filming the bottom of his shot glass. "You don't push'm up no how," he said. "You just go along for the ride." When Nick looked at him uncomprehendingly, he went on, "All they need the pilot for is to plant the flag. The ship operates itself."

"You no push'm on?"

"Oh, sure, you have to start it. That is," he amended, "you have to tell it what you want it to do. There's a little perforated card you feed into its brain-box before you blast off and another one that you feed into it when you're ready to come back. They're all ready—hanging on the Christmas tree, so to speak, just waiting for you to use them." He signed. "A kid could do it. Even you could do it."

Nick smiled. He went into the kitchen, returned several minutes later with a quart can of whiskey. He set it on the bar, opened it. Disbelievingly, Cohill watched while he filled his shot glass to the brim. "Drink'm up," Nick said.

Cohill's big fingers plucked the glass from the bar; he raised it to his lips. "Noble Keeper of the Golden Keys, I salute you," he said, and downed the shot.

Nick poured him another. "Head belong you he savvee little bit too much," he said. "Head belong you he savvee ration belong Blake and he savvee ration belong Barnaby. He no savvee ration belong Nikita."

Cohill smote the center of his forehead with the palm of his hand. "Well I'll be damned!" he

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said. "You would rate a ration at that, seeing as how you're a member of the crew. And you've been saving it all this time. Saving it—for me!" His face grew radiant, especially his nose. "King Solomon of the Spaceways, I salute you!" he said, and downed the second.

Nick poured him one more and took the can back to the kitchen and locked it in the chest. "Sun he come up many times," he said, returning.

Cohill shook his head ruefully. "Not so many times," he said. "Not for me, anyway." When Nick looked at him questioningly, he let the cat out of the bag, hoping it would obtain him another drink: "I'm blasting off day after tomorrow," he said. "At 0430, to be exact." In view of the fact that Colonel Dennison was going to release the information the next day and in view of the fact that it would come as no surprise to most of the men, the breach of security was but a minor one.

It came as no surprise to Nick either, but he didn't let on. He didn't go back to the kitchen and get the can of whiskey either. Cohill sighed. "And I thought you were my friend," he said.

"Nikita good fella friend belong you," Nick said. "Come along bar sun he go down long time little bit, you see."

Cohill beamed. "King Sholomon, I shalute you," he said, and staggered out into the night.

Nick's smile did not diminish. If anything, it grew wider. Before he turned in that night (he slept in a small room off the kitchen), he stepped outside and looked at the stars. Pluto was a smidgin of light no larger than a flyspeck, hanging low on the horizon; but to him it was diamond-bright and beautiful—the cynosure of the heavens. After a while he went back inside and lay down on his bunk and closed his eyes and tried to sleep.

Next night the bar was full all evening. Everyone wanted to toast Captain Cohill and wish him Godspeed, and during the course of the evening, everyone, including Colonel Dennison, did. Unfortunately for Cohill, however, the colonel never once left his side, and he was limited to his own ration, the two shots of which he dispatched in the first five seconds. Throughout the remainder of the proceedings he kept glancing at the clock and licking his lips.

Colonel Dennison lingered till after everyone else had gone. Just before he left he came over and shook Cohill's hand, placing his other hand on Cohill's shoulder. "Yours is a mission fraught with peril," he said sententiously. "But know that we here at the base who only stand and wait are with you in the spirit if not the flesh, and that when you plant the flag, our hands as well as yours will be

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upon the staff. Farewell, Captain. Godspeed!"

After he had gone, Nick dimmed the lights. Cohill was standing at the end of the bar, staring into a glass that had been empty hours ago. When he raised his eyes, Nick saw the naked fear in them, and his smile grew even wider than the world. He hurried into the kitchen, and this time when he returned, he bore two quart cans of whiskey.

Cohill's hand trembled as he tossed off the first three shots; after that, though, it steadied, and some of the fear faded from his eyes. He seemed inordinately eager to talk about his girl friends, and Nick, far from objecting, encouraged him. He dwelt longest on the red-headed nurse he had met on his last furlough. "Stacked, by God!" he said. "Stacked like a starship! And beautiful as space. Hair the color of Mars-light; eyes as blue as the belt of Orion; skin as golden as the sun . . . Afterward, though, she was the same as all the others." He stared at his empty glass. Nick filled it again. "'s funny," Cohill went on. "The minute that happens, they change. They're not any good any more." He downed the shot. "It was the same way with Iphigenia."

Nick made no comment, but puzzlement must have shown in his brown eyes; either that, or Cohill wanted to talk about Iphigenia. "She was the starship I made my first solo in," he explained. "Tall, graceful, delicate—far loverlier than a real woman. A thousand times nobler. And yet when she gave me what I wanted I found out I didn't really want it after all. I wanted something else, I don't know what, and I hated her for not giving it to me. 's funny," he repeated.

Nick looked at him keenly, filled his glass again. Still he said nothing. "I hate 'em all," Cohill said, tossing off the shot. "They're all alike, everyone of them!" He raised his eyes to the thick-paned window behind the bar and gazed at the distant silhouette of the *Starhope*. "I hate you too!" he shouted suddenly, and flung his glass at the panes.

The glass shattered, fell to the floor. Imperturbably, Nick produced another, set it on the bar and filled it. Cohill's action had been more revelatory than a thousand words. He did not drink because he feared death—he drank because he wanted it and couldn't get it. He had become a pilot because he wanted it, and had pretended to himself that what he really wanted was the stars—

Abruptly Nick wondered why *he* really wanted the stars . . .

Cohill's outburst seemed to have calmed him. He raised the new glass to his lips, "Keeper of the Golden Keesh, I shalute you," he said, and downed the whiskey.

Nick smiled and filled the glass

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again. "Big fella marster colonel," he said. "He say'm good-by sun he come up?"

Cohill shook his head. "No more good-by's. Tomorrow morning I go straight to the ship when the CQ wakes me. The colonel and all the off-duty pershonnel will be in the tower for the countdown."

"Big fella marster colonel, he say'm good-by over talk-talk?"

Cohill looked at him blankly for a moment. Then: "Oh, you mean the radio." He shook his head again. "No. I repeat the last ten seconds of the countdown so they'll know I'm all right. Thash all."

Nick relaxed, not visibly, but inside him where the tight knot of worry was. It was a point that had bothered him: a spacesuit concealed your physical characteristics, but a radio did not do the same for your voice. Carrying on even a brief conversation might have betrayed him, but counting from ten to zero on the heels of someone else's words should give him no trouble.

He poured Cohill another shot. "Good old King Sholomon," Cohill said, downing it.

Nick continued to pour, Cohill to drink. The man had an alcoholic threshold as high as the moon. "Did I tell you about Iphigenia?" he asked presently. When Nick continued to smile warmly at him without answering, he went on: "Stacked, by God! Beautiful's space. Hair the color Marshlight; eyes blue's Orion's belt; skin's golden as the shun." He stared into the glass which Nick had just filled. "I tell you, Nick, she wash a woman!—but she washn't any good." He drank the whiskey. When he lowered his arm, his elbow missed the bar and he nearly went down. He righted himself with difficulty. "We went on a trip together, you know."

Half a can later, it was all over, and the captain was slumbering peacefully on the floor. Nick trussed him expertly, stuffed a bar rag in his mouth, secured it and dragged him into the kitchen. Doubled up, he fitted nicely into the flour bin. Avoiding the sentry, Nick made his way across the grounds to Cohill's private quarters and let himself inside. Cohill's spacesuit was hanging on the wall. He checked its gauges and connections, then tried it on for size. He found that by stuffing the feet with several odds and ends of Cohill's clothing he could manage it quite nicely. Finally he took off the suit, laid it on the bed, and armed with a length of rope, squatted down by the door to await the coming of the CQ.

"There he is now," Colonel Dennison said. "Right on time."

The other men in the tower room followed his eyes. 0430 represented dawn, Earth time, but

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dawn was an unknown quality on Miranda, and the spacesuited figure walking slowly toward the locks was hardly more than a ghostly blur. "Looks kind of insignificant, doesn't he, sir," Barnaby said.

"Man is an insignificant creature when you use only his stature for a criterion," said the colonel. "But when you use his imagination as well, he is bigger than the cosmos." The colonel still believed that civilization was on the level.

"Yes sir, that's true," Barnaby said.

The spacesuited figure was obscured by the locks now. When it emerged a moment later at the tower's base, it waved one arm in an awkward farewell to the men gazing down from above. Then it started walking slowly across the ice-clad plain toward the *Starhope*.

Colonel Dennison began to fidget. He knew of course that you had to walk slowly with only Miranda's tenuous gravity to hold you down, but it seemed to him that Cohill was overdoing it. It began to look as though the spacesuited figure would never reach the ship, but finally it did. Slowly, it started up the metal Jacob's ladder—

The officer in charge of countdown raised the mike to his lips. "Zero plus ten minutes."

Cohill should have been in the ship by now, strapping himself into the pilot's seat, but the spacesuited figure was only halfway up the ladder. The colonel resisted an impulse to grab the mike out of the countdown officer's hand and shout, "Hurry up, for God's sake hurry up!" There was plenty of time, he reassured himself: countdown schedules always allowed for unanticipated delays. Still and all, though—

He was relieved when the figure finally disappeared through the *Starhope's* locks. "Zero plus five minutes," the countdown-officer said.

Plenty of time, the colonel reassured himself again. After all, Cohill was a seasoned pilot and ought to know what he was doing if anybody did. A good dependable man, if ever there was one. He drank, sure, but lots of pilots drank. Cohill kind of overdid it sometimes, though—

"Zero plus four minutes—"

—Take that business of his drinking Barnaby's and Blake's rations. The colonel had been hep to what was going on, but he had overlooked it because he figured that a man with Cohill's responsibilities needed an extra drop or two—

"Zero plus three minutes—"

—to relax. The colonel had been careful not to let on he knew. That was the kind of a commanding officer he was. Understanding. Kind. Mag—

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"Zero plus two minutes—"

—Magnanimous. Most commanding officers would have lowered the boom. But not him. He, Colonel Dennison, understood men. He knew when to look the other way and when not to. He knew—

"Zero plus one minute . . . fifty-nine seconds—"

—He knew that the two main pursuits of off-duty spacemen were women and whiskey, and that when you deprived them of both you were asking for trouble. The colonel stood up a little straighter—

"Zero plus ten seconds—"

He listened eagerly for the next voice. It followed promptly on the heels of the countdown-officer's: "Ten seconds." For some reason it sounded strained and unnatural.

"Nine."

"Nine."

(Slightly guttural, too.)

"Eight."

"Eight."

(Had Cohill been drinking?)

"Seven."

"Seven."

(Impossible!)

"Six."

"Sikkis."

(Sikkis?)

"Five."

"Five."

(Where had he heard that atrocious mispronunciation before?)

"Four."

"Four."

(Wildly, the colonel searched his mind.)

"Three."

"Three."

(Suddenly he remembered: the other night he had asked the mess-boy how much coffee there was left—)

"Two."

"Two."

(—and the mess-boy had replied, "Sikkis bokkises,"—)

"One."

"One."

(Good Lord!)

"Zero."

"Zero."

"Wait!" the colonel shouted, but he was too late. The *Starhope* had already become a star.

In trajectory, a spaceship is like a painted ship upon a painted ocean. There is no perceptible movement anywhere. The stars and the immensities between them comprise the inner surface of a gigantic sphere, and in the precise center of the sphere the ship hangs poised like a shining needle, its wake a bright thin thread trailing behind it.

In the heart of the ship, if it is a manned one, sits the pilot. Day after day he sits there. Week after week. He has no function. He is a passenger, really. A flag man. The inverted bowl of the viewscope rims his head at eye-level, and on its transparent inner surface he can see infinity, but he can

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do nothing about it, save look at it. The viewscope is a dunce cap, really, a dunce cap several sizes too big for his head which has slipped down over his eyes and which he lacks the inclination to raise. And the pilot's seat is the dunce stool on which he sits while the mechanical pupils carry out their tasks under the guidance of the mechanical teacher.

The man in this case was a small black one who had read a comic-book underneath a banyan tree one day and had never been the same since. His name was Nikita Eisenhower Jones . . .

After leaving Miranda, Nick activated the radio long enough to inform the base that they would find Captain Cohill in the flour bin and the CQ in the closet of Cohill's room, then he turned it off in the middle of a furious outburst by Colonel Dennison and sat back to enjoy the ride.

Pluto was a pale yellow at first, but as the weeks passed, it transmuted gradually to a glinting blue. Neptune, far away on its orbit, did not enter into the picture at all, and Nick would have had no eyes for it if it had. Pluto, and Pluto alone, had reality.

Eagerly he watched it grow on the inner surface of the dunce cap. It was not a large planet—indeed, it was only a refugee-moon—but with nothing save the distant stars to compare it to, it seemed larger than Saturn, larger even than Jupiter. True, it had no shining rings, no glowing red streak; but it was beautiful in its own right, and as he watched, its beauty grew and grew, and the sense of frustration he had known for so long gave way before a sense of pride.

Why pride? he wondered—and again he wondered why he really wanted the stars. To Cohill, they spelled death. What did they spell to *him*, deep in his unconscious where his true self lurked?

He shook his head. He did not know.

Turnover took him completely by surprise when it finally came. He had been expecting it momentarily in one part of his mind, but the rest of his mind had been so absorbed with the blue-glinting sphere snowballing toward him that his awareness was blunted. For a moment he could not understand where the planet had disappeared to, and panic touched him; then, remembering, he pulled down the viewscope mirror and looked through it at the opposite hemisphere of the scope. He saw the incandescent rapiers of the braking rockets lancing down, and the gouts of half-melted ice exploding from the surface. Again, absorption with his destination usurped him, and he did not notice the red flashes of the alarm signal, nor become aware of the insistent ringing of the bell, till it was too late. Possibly he wouldn't

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have had time to lower the third foot, which had failed to obey the impulse of the *Starhope's* brain, in any case.

As crashes go, it was not a spectacular one. But it was an effective one insofar as his hopes of ever returning to Miranda were concerned. The *Starhope* fell on its side, the impact springing both the inner and the outer locks. Hearing the crescendoing hiss of escaping air, he wriggled quickly into Cohill's spacesuit. He barely had time to seal the helmet before the interior of the ship became a vacuum with a mean temperature of —350 degrees Fahrenheit.

He tried the radio first, found it dead. Then for a long while he could not think. Finally he got the flag and managed to squeeze through the locks with it. Some distance from the ship he held the base of its staff to the ice and turned on the tiny motor that activated the roots. The steel roots penetrated deeply into the ice and spread out, and the steel staff and its flexible-foil flag became a new feature of the Plutonian landscape.

Nick raised his eyes then—and saw the plain. He turned—and saw the plain. He turned again, and again, and every time he turned he saw the vast glinting emptiness rolling away in wave after frozen wave to the dark star-flecked edge of space.

He dropped his eyes and went back to the ship, intending to re-enter it. But during his absence, it had settled still further, and the sprung locks had closed. He tried to open them, but the re-entry switch was dead—as dead as he was shortly going to be.

He turned away and started walking out over the plain. He did not intend to go far, but he was not thinking clearly, and he must have covered a quarter of a mile before he stopped and turned around. His shocked eyes took in nothingness. Blue-glinting nothingness. Both the ship and the flag had blended into the ice-bejeweled landscape.

He started back in the direction from which he thought he had come. A half hour passed, and the blue-glinting plain remained unchanged. He reversed his direction. To no avail. The ship and the flag were lost. Or perhaps it was he who was lost. He shrugged his shoulders. It did not matter. He would never see Miranda again anyway. Miranda or Malaita.

He went on walking. His heating unit was not functioning properly, and he could feel the increeping cold in his hands and feet. That did not matter either: there was only about a two-hour supply of oxygen left in his tanks, and if the cold didn't get him, asphyxiation would. After a while he began thinking that perhaps Pluto was inhabited. There might even be cities. Perhaps if he looked long enough he might find

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one. He looked and he looked. He was surprised when he came to the jungle. It was a Malaitan jungle—no question about that—though what it was doing on Pluto he could not fathom. He plunged into it eagerly and the familiar trees rose reassuringly around him. He was overjoyed when he came to the yam patch, and he dropped down on his hands and knees and began digging in the rich dark soil with his hands.

After a while his fingers began to hurt, and raising them before his eyes he saw to his surprise that they were encased in thick unwieldy gloves. The yam patch faded away then, and the trees, and the plain came back, blue-glinting and malevolent, with the cold stars glittering above it.

He lay down upon his back and looked up at the stars. He was very tired. One of the stars was the sun, perhaps, but he had no idea which one it was. The heart of the First Fire that Kamikau, millennia before, had thrown into the sky. He smiled wanly. Old Kuvi-Kavi's cosmogony was badly in need of revision. It accounted for the moon and the sun and the stars, but how about the planets? Whose heads were they?

And suddenly Nikita Eisenhower Jones understood—in the last lucid moment ever to be granted to him—why *he* had wanted the stars.

He could have laughed if he had had the strength. It was ironic really. And it proved once and forever that the essential nature of man—regardless of his creed or color—had not changed since the first primate had climbed down from the trees and taken up residence in a cave; that, while man's goals might seem noble on the surface, they were basically no different from the selfish goals of his ancestors.

But perhaps the time might come when he would rise above himself and act out of nobler motives. And again that time, his primitive yearning for the stars would stand him in good stead. The conquest of the solar system was a part of a bridge that would eventually connect it with other systems; perhaps when the bridge was a finished product, man would be a finished product too . . .

He felt quite comfortable now—and warm, too, if you could call numbness warmth. But the lucid moment had passed. *What name you gammon along me, big fella marster God?* he said. *What name you gammon along me? Big fella sun he long way too much.* Kai-kai, *he stop no more* . . . Around him, the plain stretched away to the dark and soundless sea of space, and above him the stars shone coldly down. He raised his arms with the last residue of his strength and tried to touch them . . . and as he did so he felt the

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ground stir beneath his back. Slowly, the plain, the ice, the very bedrock, became a cold integral part of him. He saw the blue-glinting mountains of his shoulders spreading massively away into the pale distances and he became aware of the cold, crushing weight of his vast blue-glinting body. He felt the awesome breath of absolute-zero reach out and touch his Brobdingnagian face. Lying there, he became mankind—mankind straining agonizingly outward, his attenuated body light years long, reaching hungrily for the stars, and brushing their cold cruel light with his tense yearning fingertips.

18th World Science Fiction Convention

The *18th World Science Fiction Convention*, "*Pittcon*," will be held September 3, 4, and 5 at the Penn-Sheraton Hotel, Pittsburgh, Pa. Guest of honor will be James Blish, winner of the 1959 Hugo Award for his novel A CASE OF CONSCIENCE. Toastmaster at the banquet will be Isaac Asimov. Among the science fiction personalities on the program will be Hal Clement, Philip José Farmer, Sam Moskowitz, and many others. Registration fee is $2.00 ($1.00 for overseas members). Your check and/or request for additional information should be mailed to—*Pittcon*, c/o Dirce S. Archer, 1453 Barnsdale Street, Pittsburgh 17, Pa. Make your check payable to P. Schuyler Miller, Treasurer, or to 18th World Science Fiction Convention Committee.

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Jack Sharkey is a new, young writer who made his first appearance in print less than two years ago—and has been showing up regularly ever since. Some of the reasons for his success are apparent in . . .

THE FINAL INGREDIENT

by Jack Sharkey

THE LITTLE GIRL PAID HER PENny to the man behind the counter and stood implacably as he patted her on the head before giving her the tiny wax bottle.

"Will there be anything else?" he asked, just as though she were a grown-up customer, but she shook her head, sending her golden braids flying, and rushed out.

She ran till she reached the corner, then slowed her pace and began to stroll along the sidewalk toward her house, examining her purchase. The bottle contained about a teaspoonful of liquid, the color of a pomegranate berry, but the little girl, after deftly decapitating the bottle with the sharp edge of her thumbnail, shook this out onto the sidewalk and left it spreading redly in the sunlight.

"Whatcha got, Katie?"

She jammed the two pieces of wax into the pocket of her pinafore. "Nothin', Joey." She stood still, scuffing a shoe on the cement.

"Are ya *really* gonna do it?" asked Joey, his face suddenly dominated by eyes.

Katie sighed, and took the bottle and cap-piece out again. "If you saw what I had, why'd you ask?" she said half-angrily, starting toward her house once more. Joey tagged after her, whipping the air with a stick and humming idly.

Suddenly he said, "Kin I watch?"

"*No!*" Katie whirled to face him, her arms rigid at her sides, her cheeks hot and flushed. "You'll ruin everything, Joey!"

"No I won't," he protested. "I'll just sit quiet and watch. I won't say nothin' at all."

"It'll spoil the whole spell!" Katie insisted.

"Who says?" demanded Joey.

"Witches *always* do their spells alone." Katie retorted.

"Aw . . ." Joey flung away the stick in disgust. "Whatta you wanna be a witch *for*, anyhow?"

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"To work spells on people, and things like that."

"Aw, you're crazy." said Joey. "It'll never work. But kin I watch, anyhow? Don't I carry your books for you? Don't I always wait after school and help you dust the erasers?"

"That's different." Katie pouted. "It's more social. This is supernatural."

"If you don't let me watch, I'll tell." Joey jutted out his lower lip. "So there."

Katie wished she knew how to call down lightning, but she was just a beginner, so she could only fume, midway between anger and tears. "All right," she said, finally. "But if it doesn't work, it'll be your fault."

"Will not."

"Will too."

Still arguing the point, they trudged to Katie's house, and walked round to the back porch, where Katie held back a strip of the skirting latticework while Joey crawled under into the dust and cobwebs and gloom, then squeezed after him.

"Whatta ya do first?" asked Joey, hunkering down.

Katie, on her knees before the circle of concrete ringing the manhole-lid, sat back on her heels and groaned. "*Will* you be *quiet?*" she pleaded. "You promised!"

"Okay, okay." said Joey, and was quiet.

Katie set the two pieces of wax carefully on the concrete, then took a small matchbox out of her pocket and, sliding open the drawer, dumped its contents out. Matches, blotting-paper shreds, and a tuft of hair fell beside the wax.

Katie began to flatten the cap-piece and bottle under the ball of one thumb, breathing raspily through her nostrils with the intensity of her concentration, till she had a whorl-embossed patty lying there, about half as wide as her hand.

Joey watched in pent-up fascination as she began to work the hairs and blotting-paper into the wax, folding the edges tightly over them. More patting, twisting and heavy breathing, and she had a roughly anthropomorphoid shape lying there, like a slightly modified starfish.

"It don't *look* like your aunt none," said Joey.

"Will you shut *up?*" Katie rasped so fiercely that Joey flinched, cracking his head against the house.

He immediately began to cry. "I'm gonna tell!" he wailed, scurrying out from under the porch on hands and knees, his face striped with dirt and tears.

"Joey, come back, I didn't mean it!" Katie cried, but he was out, up and running toward the front of the house. An instant later, she heard the chimes sounding.

Frantically, she grabbed up the

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matches, lit them all, and held them against the figurine until the imbedded hairs sputtered into black ash, then the wax went quartz-clear and ran in rivulets which congealed into grey translucency as they touched the cold concrete. Within seconds, the image had been burnt beyond recognition.

"There!" said Katie, with satisfaction. She blew out the matches, scooped the remains of her necromantic gear into a tidy heap, and poked everything down through a hole in the manhole-lid. She heard a hollow splash.

"There!" she repeated, confident that the deed could not be traced to her. Dusting her hands, she emerged from beneath the porch. Joey was just coming back toward her, from the front of the house.

"I didn't tell," he said miserably.

"How come?" she asked.

"Aw . . ." he mumbled, "You're my *girl,* aintcha?"

"What'd you tell Aunt Lucy?" asked Katie. "Or—" she lowered her voice, "did she even get to the door?"

"Huh?" asked Joey. "Oh. Oh, yeah, sure. I just pretended I wanted you to come out and play."

"Darn." Katie sighed. "There must be more to witching than I thought there was." She thought it over, puzzled. She'd had the wax, hairs from her aunt's head, and perspiration, too, sopped into the blotting paper. "I wonder why it didn't work?" she pondered, shuffling off beside Joey to play. . . .

It was a few years later that Katie (Kathryn, now) made a new try. The freshman class was having a springtime picnic, girl-ask-boy, and she'd held off asking Joe—just to let him squirm a bit—till the last minute, at which time she was mortally wounded to discover that he'd already accepted the eager invitation of Patricia Conway, a girl who'd had her eye on Joe since registration day.

Kathryn, from her bedroom windowseat, stared between the curtains at the block-distant school, before which a laughing crowd of couples was boarding the school bus, the boys carrying the lunchbaskets which the girls prepared.

"Damn," said Kathryn, "I wish it'd *rain* or something!" She glanced up at the sky. It was a monotonously cloudless blue, the underside of a china bowl with a pendant golden sun suspended at the uppermost arc. "I wonder . . ." said Kathryn. "Rain . . . how do you conjure up rain?"

She ransacked the corners of her mind for information on the subject. You had to invoke the Rain God, or the Evil Spirit of Hurricane, or—But how? She thought hard. An offering. A

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plant, maybe? Plants needed rain. . . . But it had to tie in with rain, somehow . . . . Perhaps—

"Aunt Lucy!' she called, descending the stairs to the front hall like an unhorsed Valkyrie, her twinkling feet barely grazing the steps. Her aunt, a forefinger marking her place in a book she'd been interrupted reading, came out of the parlor.

"What is it, child?" she asked, peering at Kathryn over her glasses. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes!" said Kathryn impatiently. "I wondered—is the watermelon all gone?"

"I think so, child. However, there's a nice piece of cake in the—"

Kathryn didn't even wait, just spun about and raced through the kitchen and out into the yard. The water-spotted brown paper bag with the melon remains was still jutting up from the galvanized can at the alley gate. Kathryn ripped it down the side and caught the shiny black cataract of wet seeds in the hollow of her hand.

Next stop, the dining room, for a gravy-boat, then the spice cupboard and pantry, and finally a rush upstairs to the attic, where she pried open the small square window in the sloping roof. The seeds went into the gravy boat, then a pinch of sweet basil and a dollop of olive oil.

She stirred this potpourri slowly in the dust-moted column of yellow sunlight from overhead, chanting atonally under her breath. After three minutes she stopped.

"Now it'll rain for sure," said Kathryn. "If this doesn't do it, nothing will."

That day went on record as the hottest and dryest in the town's springtime history. . . .

"Maybe," Kathryn sighed into her pillow that night, "I should have done a rain dance."

Three years later, in an attempt to get Patricia Conway out of the lead role in the class play (and herself in) Kathryn tried her hand at calling up a demon.

Down in her cellar, she drew the prescribed pentagram, mounded sulphur, antimony and garlic in its center, and, after igniting the mixture, sat cross-legged and stoic on the floor as the cellar filled with choking fumes. She was almost hoping this one wouldn't work, because she wasn't sure she'd drawn the cabalistic designs in and around the pentagram correctly, and she knew the horrible danger of evoking a demon without the pentagram-power fettering his voracious evil. She needn't have worried. All she conjured up was a sick stomach and a headache that lasted two days.

Plus a week-long hostile silence

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from her aunt, whose bridge club had had to pour out onto the front lawn until the house could be aired of the clinging odor.

"I must be lacking something," Kathryn told herself. "I think I'm *doing* the spells right. There must be some fault in *me*. But what? What is it?"

The last spell Kathryn ever tried was a love-potion. She'd had a fight with Joe, and to win back his ardor—which, whenever diverted from herself, had an annoying tendency to curve toward Patricia Conway—she'd gathered together the hard-to-get animal parts, herbs and whatnot, brewed them into a ghastly grey solution of a pleasing thickness and greasiness, and waited her chance to slip this mystic mickey to her one true love.

The potion had a single drawback. An odor like unto an ill-kept abbatoir.

But Joe came down with a really bad cold one day, and that's when she slipped him the slimy stuff, intermingled with the spicy juices of a bowl of hot Mexican chile, hoping the cayenne pepper would numb his taste-buds.

Apparently it did, for Joe had nothing but praise for her culinary skills when he left for home shortly afterward, making a date for the following night, and swearing his eternal, undying love for her—though he always did this, anyhow—and vanishing into the moonlit night at a limber trot, automatically keeping himself in trim for the track team, which he was captaining that semester.

Kathryn sighed contentedly and went to bed, falling asleep amid reveries of delicious anticipation.

Next day, Joe didn't show up at school. Food-poisoning, said the school grapevine.

He died that week, without ever recovering.

Kathryn decided she'd better lay off witching till she knew what her trouble was. Joe's death was a great shock to her, and yet—she wasn't as contrite as she'd have thought she'd be.

"The shock must have affected my emotions." she told herself. But she wasn't completely convinced. . . .

On her twentieth birthday, she met the witch.

She'd been investigating the tawdry splendors of a traveling carnival with her aunt, and had stepped inside a gypsy tent to have her fortune told. The gypsy, ancient, prune-wrinkled, had gazed briefly into an oddly-etched orange glass bowl of milky opalescent liquid, then said, bluntly, "So you want to be a witch, do you?"

"How—" Kathryn felt a steely hand dig cold razornails into her heart. "How could you know

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that? Unless—" Her eyes widened.

The old woman's wrinkles readjusted themselves into the barest semblance of a smile. She nodded slowly and peered up at Kathryn from beneath thick, heavy eyelids.

"Yes. I am a witch," she said simply. "And you could be, too, if you had the necessary ingredients."

"Ingredients?" Kathryn hesitated. "What *is* wrong with me? All my life I've— I've tried *so* hard . . ."

The old witch nodded wisely. "But with too much *love* in your heart." she said. "You can't be a witch and still have love!"

"How much is too much?" Kathryn asked.

"Any at all!" the witch rasped. "You must renounce love completely, put it out of your life, to be able to bring your enchantments to fruition. Just think back, child! You tried voodoo on your aunt, though you love her. You tried to rouse up a demon to destroy a love-rival. You tried to cause a storm to 'dampen'—if I may be permitted a small joke—your lover's ardor for another girl. And the love-potion—that speaks for itself!"

"But *why* must I renounce love?" Kathryn asked. "Can't I be a *good* witch?"

"Bah!" the witch snorted in exasperation. "Could you be a tiny giant? Or a legless dancer? You *must* renounce love, or you can never *mean* it when you cast a spell. We witches can do *only* evil, you know!"

"I'm afraid I don't understand . . ." said Kathryn.

"You little goose! It's *hard* to be bad! There are laws, you know!"

"You mean the cause-and-effect laws of magic?" said Kathryn.

The witch groaned. "Poor idiot child! I mean *criminal* laws! They have death-sentences for murderers! Prisons for thieves! Fines for speeders! You cannot escape the Law and its punishments. Why do you think people become witches in the first place? To avoid *penalties*, of course! Hell's bells, don't you see?"

"N-no!" said Kathryn, miserably.

"Stupid girl!" the witch sighed. "*Anyone* can get away with a *good* deed!"

Kathryn brightened. "I think I *do* see. If I want to get away with a *bad* deed, I have to renounce love, in order to really *intend* evil!"

"At last!" said the witch, with what sounded like relief. "Remember, child, when *people* break the laws of God and man, *they* do it for an apparent *good*. They steal in order to buy themselves things. They murder in order to get themselves something, or spare themselves something. No *person* steals, kills or commits any crime

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just for the sake of doing *evil!* Wickedness for wickedness' sake is what it takes to be a witch!"

"Oh, thank you; thank you so much!" said Kathryn, rising and turning toward the entrance. Then, "But how much do I owe you?"

"Not a cent," she answered carelessly. "Professional courtesy."

Kathryn laughed and left the tent.

"Certainly *took* you long enough!" said Aunt Lucy, wilting in the heat. "Well," she said, taking her niece's arm, "what'll we see now?"

"The cemetery, I think," said Kathryn.

Aunt Lucy just gaped.

The two women stood side by side at the foot of Joe's grave, Aunt Lucy's head bowed in prayer, Kathryn's tossed to one side in a thoughtful tilt. Kathryn was thinking, wondering, weighing, probing. The burial-place of the only man she'd ever loved seemed a fitting place to renounce love forever. It would be easy, with Joe gone, never to love anyone again.

She stared at the dry soil, sunken, bare but for a few blades of parched grass, stared at the spot where she still recalled vividly the lowering of Joe's coffin. Kathryn sighed.

How to do it? How to go about it?

I renounce love! she said forcefully inside her mind. Words. Empty words. Stupid *words,* with no conviction behind them. She tried harder. *I renounce love!* she repeated. Nothing happened. She didn't know quite what she'd expected to happen, anyhow.

No, it was all wrong. She was not approaching the thing right at all. She was speaking of love as an abstraction, not as a reality. She needed to renounce love, real love, as she felt it within her. Starting with Joe.

It was difficult, but she forced the memory of Joe's lips, his smile, his embrace to be distasteful to her. She made herself hate the memory, denied that she had ever found pleasure in his warm affection. A tiny chill ran along her veins. The sky seemed to darken to a more dusky blue.

"Kathryn, I'm getting cold," said Aunt Lucy. "May we go now? This place frightens me after dark."

"Certainly," said Kathryn. "But just one moment."

Aunt Lucy smiled and said a few more prayers, looking down upon the grave. Kathryn cast a sidelong glance at her aunt's bowed head. *I hate her!* she said, with real conviction. *I despise her, she sickens me; the milksop, the water-willed, simpering old fool!*

The chill grew along her veins, and the sky faded to cold, ominous grey. But still Kathryn felt

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unfulfilled. She seemed to be almost there, but there was some little thing, some final step—

Aunt Lucy looked up and smiled tenderly. "Shall we go now, dear?" she asked.

A pang stabbed Kathryn to the heart at the words. She was disgusted that she'd forced this hatred of her aunt to blossom within her soul . . .

And then she had it.

Myself! she thought. *I still have love of myself!*

With an ease that almost frightened her, she flooded her mind and body with an incredible self-loathing that turned the blood in her veins from warm red to frosty white. There was a tottering, timeless moment . . . she was rocking on a brink of a bottomless darkness . . .

Then her heart shriveled and emptied of all warmth and affection. Small, black and ugly it lay there, turned to stone in her breast. All tenderness and human feeling had fled her.

"It's happened!" Kathryn gasped.

The sky was suddenly black, and, with an ear-splitting clap of thunder, the storm broke. Forks of lightning crashed into the surrounding trees like a barrage as torrents of rain fell upon the two women, drenching them to the skin. The earth turned from grey dust to slippery, shiny black mud. A shrieking wind whipped a hurricane spray of dead leaves and branches high in the air along the rainswept horizon.

"Good heavens!" said Aunt Lucy. It was the last thing she ever said, as, with a mewling whimper, she sagged into a hissing puddle of greasy blood and bone. But Kathryn just stared, her witch-heart beyond horror, at the hideous pool that had been her aunt, and comprehension came upon her.

"The spells!" said Kathryn. "They're working *now!*"

The water-pelted soil on Joe's grave, grown sodden and sagging, suddenly heaved and sundered into gaping muddy cracks as a groping hand, rotting and death-white, pawed the air, seeking her.

Kathryn recognized the class ring, and remembered the love-potion she'd administered so long ago.

Her witch-heart tingled with elation and delight. "Well, I'll be damned!" she exclaimed with delight.

"Indeed," said the unfettered demon behind her.

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A story of violence, and of the human mind. . . . A story of the future—but in two senses of the word, or only one?

THE SEEDS OF MURDER

by John F. Suter

ELLIS, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE, pointed a long finger at the sheaf of typewritten pages he had just laid on the desk in front of Kendig.

"Your man's all in there. Everything. We've really done you a thorough job, gentlemen. I repeat, he's all there."

"How much would you like to bet?" I said.

My question was out of place, but it startled Ellis. He had almost leaned back in the metal chair, but it brought him forward, his shrewd deep-set green eyes snapping.

"Well, now, Doctor Carter, you're not being fair. You haven't read it yet." Then the expression on the detective's ellipsoid face relaxed. "Well, of course, the thing that made you gentlemen call on me . . . I forgot."

I think my colleague Kendig was a little annoyed. He usually is when the lines begin to appear in his plump face.

"I'm sure your report is as thorough as you say, Mr. Ellis," said Kendig. "Your agency was highly recommended."

Ellis inclined his head, his domed forehead gleaming. "Thank you, Doctor. We did try to do a job for you." He glanced at each of us searchingly. "Maybe you'd like to ask some questions before you read this?"

Kendig's brown eyes gleamed behind his glasses. If he were as impatient as I, there were two of us fighting to keep calm.

"I believe we might have one or two." His voice was calm and even. "Don't you think so, Harry?"

I studied the end of my cigarette. "I have one question." I leaned over and flicked ash as I spoke to cover up any undue emotion. "You remember, Mr. Ellis, we gave you a name: Iris. What did you find out? Who is Iris?"

Ellis took a drag at his own cigarette. "Gentlemen, as far as we're concerned, there is no Iris. I

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knew how you'd hammered at that when you gave us this job, and we've been extra-careful. Wallace doesn't know any Iris now, and we can't find that he ever did know any. And that means that we not only know the names of all the girls in every neighborhood where he ever lived, but we've been through the rolls of every grade he went through in school."

Kendig pulled at the tip of his left ear. "What was his mother's name? Full name?"

"Anna Marie Trumbull was her maiden name, changed to Wallace on marriage. No Iris among either the Trumbulls or the Wallaces." His wide, thin-lipped mouth quirked briefly. "And none of his toys or possessions was ever named that, either."

Kendig looked at him with interest. "An original notion which we didn't suggest to you, Mr. Ellis. May I ask if such service is customary?"

"No, Doctor. But with two psychiatrists for clients, I thought a fancy touch would be right up your alley."

I thought to myself that I'd like to get Ellis maneuvered into an analysis some day. Aloud, I said, "What did you find out about young Wallace and his mother?"

"First off, the old lady's dead. You know that?"

We both nodded.

"I'd bet Bill Wallace's life's been a lot brighter since that happened. It was natural causes, by the way. Cerebral hemorrhage." Ellis tossed this last out casually.

Kendig showed no emotion. I hoped that I did not, either.

Ellis glanced quickly from one to the other of us. Then he shrugged.

"Nothing would've surprised me, is what I mean. When you read what I've written, you'll see. I guess he's had one long fight of it through his twenty-two years—twenty-one of them, anyway. She died a year ago. She beat him often, lots of times without much excuse. She ran off all his friends. He never had any pets, that goes without saying. She made him take odd jobs to earn money when he was a kid, and she took all the money for herself. Didn't need it, either. When her husband died, seventeen years ago, she was left pretty well fixed. And as for young Bill and girls—you can guess."

He stopped and looked at us again. "Maybe this fits in with something you've uncovered? I mean, I read somewhere about mother fixations and all the trouble they cause."

Kendig said carefully, "What you've told us is very helpful, Mr. Ellis. I'm sure your report will be even more helpful."

"Thanks." He was still watching us, looking for some reaction. It was hard for me not to show

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one, even if people do say I remind them of "a strong, silent Westerner." I've never tried to live up to that reputation, and it comes hard when I have to be impersonal.

"Phil," I said to Kendig, "I imagine Mr. Ellis must be wondering when we're going to pay him."

"No, no, Doctor," Ellis said. "It never crossed my mind. I'll send you a bill at the end of the month. You needn't be in any hurry. I never had any question—"

Kendig reached for a pen. "The University's credit is good, I'll grant. But Doctor Carter and I are paying for this. You know nothing about *our* credit."

Ellis protested more. "No, I wouldn't take it at this time. Haven't figured up all of the expenses. Let me send you a bill."

Kendig laid the pen down deliberately. "I like to get things settled, Mr. Ellis. If your agency hadn't been recommended as extremely honest, I'd be certain you had something unpleasant in the back of your head."

Kendig outclasses me in many ways, but sometimes he can miss the obvious in ordinary matters. "I think the only thing Mr. Ellis has is curiosity," I said.

Ellis's work evidently had thickened his hide over the years. He did not redden or show any other sign of being flustered. "Well, now, Doctor Carter, I'm human. Sure, I'm curious. But when I'm asked to do something, I do it. If the customer doesn't want to elaborate, that's his business. If I get too nosey, I lose customers. It's not smart to lose customers."

Kendig crossed his arms. "I hear a certain amount of claptrap about detectives respecting confidences, even under extreme pressure. Is there any truth in it?"

Ellis spread his hands. "I'm still in business. Would I be, if I didn't know when to keep buttoned up?"

"Phil," I said, "we're going to publish, anyway."

Kendig looked foolish momentarily, then covered up. "Certainly, Harry. But perhaps we won't include this one." He stared at me for a moment, then looked at Ellis. "Mr. Ellis, I think we'll take a chance. You'll tell no one what you hear?"

"Doctor, when I go out that door I'll have forgotten it. That's a promise."

I smiled. "You'll not forget this, Ellis. Maybe officially. But not personally."

Kendig got up and walked across the office. First, he locked the door. Then he went to the safe and removed several reels of tape. He ended at the tape recorder, placing one of the reels in the machine.

"Mr. Ellis, these tapes were re-

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corded two months ago. They have been played back only once since they were made. Doctor Carter and I have avoided them in order to keep open minds." He fiddled with the machine, "Doctor Carter and I have been experimenting with hypnotic regression, using some of our students as willing subjects."

"Phil, better keep the discussion nontechnical. We don't want to seem to be trying to put one over."

"Sorry. To translate, Mr. Ellis, we have hypnotized some of our students and have suggested to them that the date is such-and-such in the past—say, April 10, 1939. The student relives his experiences, and we note them."

Ellis leaned forward, interested. "This is real? They don't feed you a line?"

"We think not. Their accounts are perfectly consistent with the age level of the time suggested."

"Sounds like you're onto something."

"It's nothing new," I said. "Several good men have tried it and reported on it. We've been looking for some original line to follow."

Still working with the recorder, Kendig said, "This tape is William Trumbull Wallace's. We have suggested that he is age twelve. I'm going to skip the portion where we hypnotize Wallace. Take my word for it—he *was* hypnotized."

As he spoke, I saw again the tall form of Bill Wallace stretched out on the couch—big and sturdy as a forest giant, dark, tightly-curling hair—but big, sad eyes and a cleft chin. A woman wouldn't have a chance: he'd either have to be worshiped or mothered.

I heard my own voice coming from the speaker: *Bill, you know what day this is, don't you? It's March 26, 1949.*

He answered: *March 26 1949. Yes.*

Tell us about it, Bill.

I'm coming home. Coming up the front walk.

What kind of walk, Bill?

Brick. The sidewalk out along the street is cement. It's brick from the house to the street. Laid in squares, the bricks turned a different way in every other square.

Ellis nodded in agreement. He'd seen that walk.

All right, Bill. What kind of day is it?

"It's a pretty day. The sun feels good. Gee, I hope winter's really gone. There's a few crocuses along the walk, ready to open, it looks like . . . Now I'm on the front porch, taking off my overshoes.

Why overshoes, Bill?

Huh? Mom—Mother—said to wear 'em. Said the ground's still muddy, even if the snow is gone.

All right. Go on, Bill.

Now I'm going in and hanging my jacket in the hall closet . . .

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Hello, Mother . . . No, I didn't leave the overshoes by the front door. Here they are, on the closet floor. I scraped 'em clean, too . . . But Mother, I'm not very late! I came straight home, I only lost a minute or two helping Mr. Townsend get his storm door off. I held the door steady while he pulled the pins on the hinges . . . Why, yes, he did. He gave me a dime. I thought it was too much, but he made me take it . . . No, I've still got it . . . Aw, couldn't I keep it this time? My old pocketknife's sprung—look, I'll show you—and I'd like to get enough to buy a new one . . . I do too need a new one! Lots of times, when I'm doin' something for somebody . . . But I can't fix it. I've tried. Well, I was careful I've had this one four or five years, I guess . . . Oh, all right! Here's the darn dime . . . What're we having for dinner, Mom—Mother? . . . Oh . . . Oh, sure, I like potato soup all right. It's just . . . Could we maybe have sausage sometime? I like sausage . . . Oh—yeah. I'm sorry. I forgot it upsets you . . . No, no, forget I said it. I don't want you to be sick just on account of me *. . . Now, look, Mother, I don't want you to. Please! . . . Huh? Today? Nothin' special. Just another day . . . Well, now, wait. I forgot. Doctor Redmond's been talkin' to me about joinin' the church . . . Well, he says I am old enough, and that it's a sort of responsibility. And that's like you always say, I better be watchin' my responsibilities. Anyway, if I go and study at the church one night a week from now until . . . Aw, Mother,* why *not? But I am old enough! I know what I'm doin'! . . . Well, no, I've never pledged any money at church, yet. Aw, I don't think they can make me sign up for any definite amount . . . I'd just give what I could. A nickel a week, like now . . . It wouldn't? I think you've got the wrong idea, Mother . . . Now, I didn't say that. No, I didn't say you lied. Anybody can make a mistake. Maybe you're mistaken . . . Anyway, I want to join. I like St. Matthew's. I like to go there. They treat me nice . . . No, I never said you didn't. I wasn't even thinking it . . . But I am gonna join . . . Yes, I am . . . What if I tell Doctor Redmond you won't let me? . . . Oh, yes, I would, if he wanted to know what I had decided to do . . . I wouldn't go right to him, but I wouldn't lie about it . . . Mother! You use that belt on me for this and God'll punish you! . . . You're mean to me, and you won't let me come unto Jesus like He said! He said* forbid them not. *He did! I try to be good, I try hard, and when I want to be extra-good, you won't let me! No, you won't! You won't! . . .*

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Kendig turned the volume down and looked at Ellis, who had been listening intently. There were only a few more feet of take left, and the sound on them was unintelligible.

"You get the idea, Mr. Ellis."

Ellis nodded and wiggled a finger toward his report.

"It fits." He leaned back in his chair. "You know, that's a pretty good recall."

"Ellis," I said, "it's not just recall, as you probably think of it. For that period, he *was* a twelve-year-old again."

Kendig rewound the tape and slipped another one on.

"Let's see what you think of this, Mr. Ellis."

I tried to see which one he was using. "What's this one, Phil?"

"This is Terry. I thought we'd better use a warm-up."

I turned to Ellis. "Terry is a different subject. A girl, Edna Terry. Please listen carefully."

Ellis looked at me as though he thought we had sold him out. "That name wasn't in your instructions. We didn't come across any Terry girl."

"You shouldn't have," I said, casually. "She has no bearing on the case. Another subject, entirely."

The recorder began to speak. Kendig was talking:

Edna, listen carefully, this is very important. Today is June 14, 1963. . . .

Ellis's reaction was all I'd hoped for. A slap in the face would have had the same effect. He muttered, *"Three years from now?* For the love of—!"

Kendig waved him to be quiet.

June 14. Why, yes. Yes! . . . This is the day! It's a beautiful *day . . . There are the birds; morning light's pure gold . . . I wonder if* he's *up this early, too? Oh, Bob, Bob! Four hours until 10 o'clock! Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Stone . . . What? Oh, no, Mother, don't fix me any breakfast. I don't think I could eat a bite . . . Strength? Who needs strength? I could live on air today . . . You're sure everything's ready for the reception? Did Mrs. Black ever send over the extra punch cups? I've been so excited, I didn't notice . . . I wonder where Bob's going to hide the car? He said for me not to worry, Frank Hughes and that crowd would never find it . . . Well, I'm not so sure. That Frank can think up* more *things . . . I wonder if I'll be like Betty McCulley when I'm supposed to say,* I do? *She was so meek and mousy all through the ceremony, up to that point, and she practically shook the rafters when she said it. If everybody hadn't been crying so, she'd have brought the house down . . . Mother—try not to cry, will you? . . . You're not really losing me! . . .*

Kendig shut it off.

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"I think you get the idea, don't you, Mr. Ellis?"

Ellis's jaw was slack.

"You're kidding!"

"No."

"It was framed! It was somebody rehearsing for a play. Or you fixed it up to throw me off."

Kendig went on working with the machine. Unconcernedly he said, "It's the genuine article, Mr. Ellis."

"We'd give anybody an affidavit," I said.

"However," said Kendig, staring at me through his glasses, "there are different points of view."

He picked up another roll of tape and fitted it into the machine.

Ellis looked at me uneasily. "I thought I had both feet on the ground. Now—"

Kendig started the machine. "Gentlemen, we return to young Wallace."

My voice came out of the speaker:

Now, Bill, you feel quiet and laxed?

Yes, I feel fine.

All right. We're going ahead now, to September 15, 1965. Got that? September 15, 1965.

September 15, Yeah . . . What a day! Boy, am I tired! I'm going to need glasses at this rate. My eyes . . .

Bill, I don't get you. Where are are you?

Huh? Oh—getting out of my car. I've got it parked in the driveway.

Driveway? Where? Where are you living?

Why, at my house. You know. You've been there. Just a little place. Well, you never did come back after that first time . . . Not all the place a man could want, but we'll have a better one some day . . . I hope.

What kind of car? What does it look like?

Car? . . . Oh, just a Chevvy . . . Last year's . . . Two-door. You remember the ads . . .

All right, Bill. I'll shut up. You were going into the house.

Yeah . . . Door still sticks, a little . . . Wish I could remember . . . Oh, hi, Iris . . .

I didn't dare look at Ellis's face.

Oh, just another day, chasing columns of figures. Thank God for the IBMs, or it really would have been one for the books. I think I'll have a quick one . . . Look, let's not get off on that again. This is my house, too, and if I want a drink, I'll take one . . . You don't have to like it. If you'd married a drunk, it would be something different. You've never seen me anything but sober, have you? . . . Well, have you? . . . All right, don't *admit it . . . That's what I like about you. You expect me to admit what a heel I am every five minutes, but*

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you never admit anything. Hell with it . . . Well, now I feel a little better. Where's the paper? . . . What? Who? . . . No, thanks. Tell 'em to look for another boy. Tell 'em to hire themselves a full-time accountant . . . I should keep books for Dwyer's Confectionery in my spare time! . . . Well, sure I appreciate your trying to line it up, but life's just too damn short. I don't get out enough as it is. Work all day and spend all my spare time keeping the place up . . . Don't know why you fussed about it when I wanted to hire out the painting. We'd have got it done a lot quicker, and I wouldn't have used up so much of my vacation . . . Well, maybe having my own office would give me more money to hire things out and maybe it wouldn't . . . What do you do with all the money I give you? Save it? Sure, maybe a day'll come when we need it, but I figure we need some of it every day . . . Oh, hell, I'll take the pup for a walk . . . Here, Mike, Here, boy. Come on, Boy. Here, Mike . . . Iris, do you know where Mike is? . . . Well, all right, but you can give me a civil answer about where my dog is. I know you don't like him, but I do . . . What? WHAT DID YOU SAY? . . . Just for a bunch of dahlia plants? With the mattock? You hit him with it and then had the garbage man haul him off? . . . NOW YOU LOOK HERE, Iris . . . You don't let me have a life of my own. You hoard all our money so it's no good to us. You want me to work twenty-six hours a day because you're greedy for more. And then, because an animal gives me a little affection, you . . . I'M SICK OF YOU! SICK OF YOU! . . . LET ME GET MY HANDS ON YOU, YOU . . . NO, YOU WON'T GET OUT OF IT . . . SCRATCHING WON'T HELP . . . GO ON, CHOKE, DAMN YOU . . . CHOKE . . . Iris. Iris! . . . Oh, my God . . .

Kendig turned and snapped the switch. Ellis's face was greenish-white. The back of my shirt was clammy.

Kendig clasped his hands and stared calmly at the detective.

"That's Iris."

Ellis shakily lit a cigarette. "And we don't know who she is. No way to warn her! Damn it, there *must* be somebody we missed!"

Kendig shook his head. "Not necessarily."

Ellis looked at me in appeal. "You mean, he hasn't even met her yet?"

I said, "We don't know that."

Kendig spoke carefully, "It's not so fantastic as you might think, Mr. Ellis. Iris might be a name which has caught his fancy. We are inclined to think—or I am, at least—that these 'future'

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manifestations are traumatic, and—"

"Stick to two-bit words, Phil," I said. "No sixty-four dollar ones, remember?"

He readjusted. "What I mean to say is—we know, from the subject's past history, that his childhood was unhappy because of his mother's influence. You confirmed that yourself. We also know that questions about *specific* things in the future—his house, his car, you recall—drew only vague answers. Young Wallace was explicit only about things which are projections of what he has on his mind at the moment."

Ellis grimaced. "What things on his mind!"

"Doctor Carter is a little more the romantic than I am. He refused to dismiss these 'futures' as rationally as I do."

I looked at Ellis and smiled without humor. "If I could make money at it, I'd go back to farming."

Ellis considered each of us in turn. "Well, which is it: Did he look into the future, or didn't he?"

Kendig put his clasped hands behind his neck. "He did not. I'll be glad to go over it in more detail, if you like."

I got up to unlock the door. "Ellis," I said, "*it doesn't matter.* Don't you see: *If he did see the future, somebody's got to watch for Iris. If he didn't, the seeds of murder are there, anyway.*"

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *So far as details are concerned, the cases described in "The Seeds of Murder" are wholly fictitious. However, the scientific experiments which suggested the plot are absolutely true. For further information please consult pages 472 and 473 of "Science," Volume 119, Number 3093, issue of April 9, 1954, where the experiments are reported by Robert Rubinstein and Richard Newman of the Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, Yale University.*

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Madison Ave., you'd say, has tried pretty nearly all the basic advertising ideas there are. Here is one, however, that we have not seen in action—and rather hope we never do. . . .

JUST A SUGGESTION

by Rosel George Brown

DO YOU WANT YOUR GARDEN TO BE THE ENVY OF ALL YOUR NEIGHBORS? GO AHEAD. YOU CAN BUY SEEDS LIKE THAT ANYWHERE. BUT THINK ABOUT IT A MINUTE. MAYBE THEY'LL ENVY YOU. BUT WILL THEY *LIKE* YOU? WHAT KIND OF GUY DO YOU WANT TO BE, ANYWAY?

YOU KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT ONE! BUT DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU CAN BUY THE SEEDS THAT DO NOT SUCCEED? THE SEEDS THAT MAKE YOUR *NEIGHBORS* FEEL GOOD?

WELL, WE CAN ANSWER THAT ONE. TRY DABNEY'S DEFECTIVE SEEDS, P.O. BOX 80, ROUTE 34 LITTLE CREEK, MO. REMEMBER *SCRAGGLY*, BUT NOT *TOO* SCRAGGLY.

"Well?" asked Llon looking over at his wife. She had been peeling off her Terran head mask and was massaging the kinks out of her capital pseudopod.

"Oof!" she telepathed. "That feels better. I don't think I can stand *one* more sewing circle. The hands are the worst of all. I simply can't manage them. And, dear, I almost can't hear little Mrs. Schmidt. Her mind keeps dying out. She literally doesn't think."

"That's fine!" said Llon. "I mean fine that she doesn't think. But darling, what do you think of my new Depth Motivation?"

"Now the trunk corset," Llona said. "Peel it *slowly*. My rigid cartilages have been scraping together all evening."

"Llona, you weren't listening to me! I've spent weeks working on this. It may be the final step. Don't you *care?*"

"Care? Of course I care. I care about you, Llon. And you've spent practically our whole honeymoon doing nothing but talk shop while I *suffer* in these skin tights and feed those wretched chickens and listen to that horrid mammal go moo-moo-moo all the time." Llona

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began to shake. "You don't l-l l . . ."

"*Stop* it!" Llon cried, clasping the midsection where his brain was located. "You know I can't *stand* over thirty c/s."

Bradley put down the magazine and laughed. And when he had finished laughing he thought about it a little.

"Say, Mona!" he called.

"59, 60," Mona said. "61, just-a-minute, 62."

"I want to show you something. It gives me an idea."

"75, 76, 77," Mona said.

"For God's *sake!*" Bradley cried. She slapped the magazine down on the coffee table and strode into the bedroom. "Can't you stop brushing your hair just *once* when I have something important to say?"

"100," Mona said. "All right, what is it?" She took out her bobby pins and began to wind her pin curls, every other one counter-clockwise, for a Froth Set.

"Well, look, Mona, I just read this crazy advertisement for crummy seeds so your neighbors won't envy your garden. Now, most people read that advertisement and they just laugh or if they're real stupid maybe they take it literally and send for the seeds. They raise these scraggly looking plants so their neighbors feel a little bit superior to them and like them instead of envying them. Now, listen to my idea, Mona."

"Clockwise," Mona said.

"Are you listening?"

"*Counter*clockwise. Of course, Honey."

Bradley sat down on the side of the bed and began running his hands through his hair, because he could think better that way.

"Look at my career this way, Mona. I've come up through the ranks like twenty other men twenty-eight years at Brandt Sheet Metal. Five of us are going to be vice-presidents. One of us is going to get to be president."

Mona held a pin curl down firmly with her left forefinger and turned to give her husband a look of absolute faith. "*You* are going to get to be president."

Even after five years of marriage and two children, Bradley never failed to be shaken by that look. It made him feel like he wore a Santa Claus suit. And like all uniforms, it had to be lived up to.

Mona unwound the curl carefully, because she had forgotten whether she had stopped on clockwise or counterclockwise.

"I hope I am," Bradley said. "Anyway, as I was going to say, what do those other nineteen men have that I don't have? Nothing. What do I have that they don't have. Nothing. By this time, Mona, the duds and the misfits have been weeded out. The eggheads are gone. The morons are gone. And just us jolly good fellows are left."

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"*Clockwise!*" Mona said. "Darling, why do you sound cynical?"

"Because—well, because I went to Brandt Sheet Metal prepared to work my ears off and race my brain twenty-four hours a day and bust through hell itself, if necessary, to get ahead. That's the way I am. When I want something, I go after it whole hog."

"I know," Mona said, sliding in the last bobby pin. She didn't set her fringe of bangs and when Bradley came over to look at her in the mirror, her reflected eyes smiled up at him through the light curls.

Bradley grasped the sides of her chair, as though he were holding on to his thoughts. "But I've been realizing—I guess even for years I've been realizing this slowly—there are some things work and sweat and brains and will power won't get you."

"Such as what?" Mona asked, smiling softly at some secret thought as she got out her cold cream.

"Such as upper echelon promotion at Brandt Sheet Metal." Bradley, sure of his thought now, let go of the chair to walk up and down. "The men they watch," he said, "are the men that can *cooperate.* The men that don't jar up the group thinking. And it really boils down to this, honey. The men they watch are the men everybody likes."

"Then all you have to do is Win Friends and Influence People."

"It's more subtle than that. It takes more than a likable moron to get where I've got at Brandt Sheet Metal. We're *all* smart. We're all likable. We all try to be just a little bit better than the other fellow. But not so much as to be offensive. A slightly better-cut suit. A slightly better-worded letter. A slightly more eager expression."

Mona was massaging the pink cream with slower and slower strokes, watching her husband in the mirror. "It's hard for me to forgive any woman," she said, "who has naturally curly hair."

"That's it!" he said, pushing her chin back to look into her face and then holding his sticky fingers out helplessly, like a child in the aftermath of a chocolate bar. "There's no way to be slightly better without being offensive. We all know what each other is doing and why we're doing it and—look, honey, I don't hate these guys. They're good guys. What I mean is . . . I want to be different in some *really* inoffensive way. I want to sneak up behind management and hit them in the head before anybody knows what's going on."

"Is this the idea you started out on while I was brushing my hair?"

"It is. Mona, I'm going to stop trying to be a little better than everybody else. I'm going to be a little *worse.*"

Mona wiped off her cold cream

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and began methodically taking the bobby pins out of her hair.

"You just spent half an hour putting those things in!" Bradley said.

"I'm having lunch with Geraldine Baldwin tomorrow."

"Well?"

"I don't want her to think I have naturally curly hair."

Link Creston threw the report across the polished desk and it flapped to the floor. This irritated Victor Grant to the point where he bit the fever blister on his thin lips and hoped he'd get blood poisoning.

Victor walked over and picked up the report, because it was only three feet from where he stood, whereas Link would have had to hoist his bulk out of his chair and walk all the way around the desk and this would make Victor seem sensitive and picayunish about his status.

Whereas they were all supposed to be pulling together on this thing and For God's sake I'm not the *boss*. I just make more money than you.

Downgrading!" Link said. "Oh, that's just swell! Use Glimmer Tooth Paste and you'll find out where the yellow went."

"Obviously that's not what it means, Link." That wasn't right. A little joke would have been in order. But he'd been sweating over this thing and working out copy late last night and all morning and suddenly he didn't have the energy to care about it.

"Then you tell me what it does mean and how we can use it."

"See here," Victor said, wishing vaguely he could stop himself, "I didn't come up with this idea. This is the latest trend, according to those psychology boys you hired. I don't have any opinions about depth psychology. If you don't want any, O.K. I'll go work on something else."

"Oh, come off it, Victor. Look, you worried about your son? I heard. I'll get him in another school. He'll straighten out. I remember when my boy—"

"I wasn't thinking about Jerry." It was true. He hadn't been, consciously. But something had been driving him to work too hard and react too fast to everything.

"O.K. We'll shelve that and get back to this Downgrading business. O.K. You're not responsible and you don't have to defend it. Read me your copy."

Victor unfolded a sheet of dirty, lined tablet paper. It looked like something a third grade child might carry around.

WHEN YOU BUY MANNEN WOOL SUITS YOU GET QUALITY WITHOUT THAT "TOO EXPENSIVE LOOK." YOU CAN GO ANYWHERE IN A MANNEN SUIT WITHOUT FEAR THAT SOMEONE WILL SNICKER BEHIND YOUR BACK, "TOM'S UPGRADING TOO FAST."

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MANNEN WOOL SUITS ARE WELL CUT, BUT NOT TOO WELL CUT."

There was a silence when Victor finished. "Well?" he asked.

Link said the last thing in the world anyone who knew him would expect him to say. And he said it with absolute seriousness.

"It's dishonest," Link said.

It broke Victor's mood and he began to laugh unrestrainedly at the whole cockeyed world. He'd been pushed beyond the final point of irritation and all of a sudden, observing life from the fourth dimension, he saw that it was totally and irresponsibly *cute*.

Link didn't like being laughed at. Particularly when he didn't know why.

"I mean," Link went on, frowning and drawing on his desk with his eraser, "the assumption that everyone wants to be successful and enviable and good looking is honest. To give the impression that you want to downgrade yourself is sneaky."

"It's just a subterfuge for upgrading yourself," Victor pointed out, still laughing and enjoying immensely his new knowledge about the world.

"Obviously," Link said, making a mental note that something *had* to be done about Victor. Maybe the boy, Jerry, could be sent to live with his mother, "That's why it's sneaky. I don't mind saying Glimmer tooth paste contains an ingredient that makes you a brilliant conversationalist. It's a lie, of course. But the assumption it's based on is true. And maybe our advertising really will give someone self-confidence and make him a brilliant conversationalist. But to say that Glimmer tooth paste makes you a little awkward at cocktail parties . . ."

"The basic assumption, as I said, remains the same."

"Yes, but it's buried so far down. We'll be operating on all these different levels of appeal, Victor. We say, Use our product and be inferior so you can eventually be a success. I don't like it. It's too far from the basic human motive. And I don't think basic human motives change."

"Human motives? No, you wouldn't think they'd change."

There was a violent clicking sound from inside a cannister marked, "Tea."

Llon and Llona looked at each other.

Llona shivered. "Let's give it up," she said. "Now it's on the map."

"That doesn't mean it's on the map," Llon said. "All it means is that it's marked for checking. It'll be four or five C's before they send a mapping crew out to this area. By that time it'll all be over. Except our share of a Public Energy Find. Which I think is one-fourth. Enough to keep you in grotelized force fields the rest of your life,

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darling. And all the spined ebees you can fit into an ebee room."

"A lot of good that'll do us in the Dark Exile!"

"There won't be any Dark Exile. We haven't done anything illegal. All we've done is honeymoon on a subgalactic planet and engage in simple commerce in native goods. What could be more innocent?"

"And they just happen to blow their planet, and possibly their entire solar system, to pieces just after we leave so we can claim discovery?"

"Exactly."

Llona lowered her eating pesudopod into their tank of algae. She wasn't hungry and the algae was tasteless, but she had trained herself to eat the stuff every seven hours, regardless.

Llon rolled over to the window to stare out at the bleak, alien landscape. It annoyed him intensely to watch women eat.

"And no one will be suspicious?" Llona asked, her thoughts a little muddled with the digestive process.

"Suppose they are? Suppose they put us in the Truth Room? We tell them the truth."

"That we planned the destruction of a subcivilized planet?"

"That we engaged in simple commerce in native fashion. What's the difference what our intentions were? Intentions have no legal bearing. We supplied no galactic scientific information. We used no telepathic compulsion."

"Didn't we?"

"*I* didn't. Unless you forced your sewing circle to break up early by telepathic compulsion."

"Don't be silly. I mean you supplied this Downgrading idea that you think is going to have such a traumatic effect on this culture."

"I merely suggested it in an advertisement. These creatures did the rest. They're very suggestible. I mean if you know what to suggest and when to suggest it. I know what to suggest, Llona, because I'm an anthropologist. And it's odd when you think of it, that we should have found this little out of the way, unexplored planet and that I was able to spot the possibilities."

"Didn't you honestly have some such thing in mind, Llon, when we started out on the trip?"

"Well, I . . . no . . . rather, to be truthful, I've always wondered whether you couldn't get a world to blow itself up by some subtle means such as this. The perfect crime, so to speak. For many years I've studied a number of subcivilized, non-telepathic cultures and worked out various schemes . . . but I was always under government supervision . . . and then ideas spread slowly among non-telepathic creatures."

"It seems to me ideas spread incredibly fast among these creatures. Look at that Organization suggestion. Togetherness. Group

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thinking. And look at that loose credit suggestion. Why, it's contrary to everything in these peoples' religious and moral background to run up all those personal debts. But all you do is throw out a suggestion and it spreads like joy mist in a windy creel."

"Sure. These people are not telepathic by our definition. But they obviously have some means of spreading ideas fast. I'd call it a collective unconscious telepathy. They don't seem to know it themselves. I don't know why. I don't know how else they account for their mob emotions. But I suppose it's like any other self-conscious life form. It takes an outsider to see it whole. And they've never known an outsider."

"Yet," said Llona.

"Ever," said Llon. "They're about to run out of 'yet.'"

Bradley sat in his glassed-in office and thought uneasily that a fish needs the glass to hold the water in but all his glass did was prevent the free flow of cigarette smoke. It did not cut off the view of Jimmy bringing around those long, white envelopes, a name scrawled in ink on each one. The personal touch.

Bradley and Guy Baldwin caught each other in a covert glance. They both looked away quickly embarrassed by the grade school atmosphere, infuriated with themselves but both too full of inward thoughts to try to cover up.

Each envelope contained a letter which said *almost* the same thing. "This is to inform you that we are temporarily reducing our executive staff due to the Depression." Then ten of them added, "It is solely for this reason that we regretfully suspend your services, with the hope that you will still be available when we are able to resume full production."

Jimmy went into Guy's office, a fan of letters in his hand. Bradley tried hard not to look. He sat and stared at an open file folder. A line of green letters. A line of red letters. But when his eyes flicked up to the top of the page, just to see what company's letter he was reading, there he was with his eyes glued on Guy.

Guy was running his tongue over the sharp edge of his upper lip. He turned the envelope over, hesitated for a flicker of an instant, and stuck it in his inside coat pocket. Either way, Bradley could see, Guy couldn't take it in public. He'd rather have the familiar torment of waiting.

Somehow watching Guy had made Bradley feel strong and sure of himself.

"Hi, Jimmy," Bradley said. "How's the wife?" It was absurd that Jimmy should be married, but he was.

"Won't speak to me." Jimmy tossed the envelope on Bradley's

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desk and drew his finger across his neck in a throat slitting gesture. Was that a reference to his wife? Or to the letters in general, in the unlikely case Bradley didn't know what they were? Or did Jimmy, whose inside information was always appalling, know who was going to get which kind of letter?

Bradley grinned, ripped open the envelope, glanced through the letter, and dropped it into the waste basket.

Then he picked up the telephone. "Get me statistical," he said, and drummed impatient fingers on the desk while he waited for the May production figures.

Link looked at both sides of four sheets of blank paper. He was not amused.

"What the hell?" he asked.

"You wanted to know what I came up with. That's what I came up with."

"Damn you, Victor, you know this is no time for jokes."

"I wasn't joking. That's the way I operate. You want a report, I send you a report. Now I can think some more."

"You've been thinking for two weeks."

Victor shrugged. "Fire me."

"Wouldn't you just love that!" Link was tired of Victor. It was impossible to be around Victor for any length of time without feeling responsible for him. And Victor reacted instinctively to this by daring people to put him on their consciences. Furthermore he really wanted to be fired. He wanted some outside reason for those intense, pink-edged eyes and that tight, pale mouth.

"Look, Victor," Link said, "If you weren't worth a million dollars now and then, I *would* fire you."

"I'm not worth anything now," Victor said. "I don't have *no* ideas. Take it or leave it."

"You're so damned irresponsible you think I have a choice. I don't. Look. You came up with that Downgrading idea. It was terrific! Well, now we're in a pinch. A *real* pinch. Everybody says the Depression is psychological. All Depressions are psychological."

"Everything is psychological," Victor said, blowing the words out with a puff of cigarette smoke.

The boy again?

Link cut the end off his cigar and lit it ceremoniously. "By the way," he asked, "how is Jerry doing at St. Simon's?"

"You're so subtle," Victor said. "I don't know how he's doing. He hasn't written me."

"Ah, well. No news is good news. He'll write when he wants money. I remember when my boy . . ."

"I think he'd rather starve," Victor said.

"Yeah? Well . . ." Why didn't Victor ever *help* a conversation? "Look, Victor. We may all be starving soon. It's getting as bad as it

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can get. Fast. The government's cut off foreign aid and cut down defense spending and cut taxes and we're all cutting each others' throats and damn it, Victor, what are we going to *do* about it?"

"Vote Democratic?"

"Don't be an ass. You and I know political parties have nothing to do with it. The economy's sick, sick, sick and I think advertising can come up with a real answer. Appeal to something in people. Whatever makes them *spend*.

"It was Downgrading, you know, that made them stop spending. First they bought things that just *looked* a little less obtrusive than their neighbors' things. Then, when the idea got fashionable, they either bought things that really were cheap or they didn't buy anything at all."

"Downgrading was a terrific idea," Link said staunchly. "It sold Glimmer tooth paste like mad."

"You didn't like the idea at first. You've got a good instinct, Link. You ought to have listened to it."

"It didn't sound like a good idea at first. But it worked."

"It did, didn't it," Victor said.

"I don't want to watch," Llona said, crouching, for some primeval source of comfort, against the roughened walls of the interstallar vehicle.

"Don't, then," Llon snapped. He could see the bright sun and seven of the planets, like spackles glittering on a royal cartilage. It was his experiment and he intended to watch it.

Llon decided, rather bitterly, that his honeymoon had been a failure—as a honeymoon, that is. Llona was narrow-minded and whiney and he knew she'd divorce him when they got back. He wondered how much she'd talk. Probably plenty. Well, he was legally safe and he'd be able to buy all the friends he needed.

Bradley pushed open the door with a shove of his shoulder. It always stuck in wet weather and he always meant to see what you could do about sticky doors, but somehow he never got around to it.

He grinned at his wife. The first grin of the day, really. "Gold bangles and satin dress and candles on the table!"

"And the children farmed out for the evening," she said. "It . . . you're hungry, aren't you?"

Bradley nodded, answering the question she was really asking. "Still in at the semi-finals," he said. He wished he could feel better about it. "Baldwin went this time."

"Let's not talk about that part just yet," Mona said. "Sit down and I'll get you a . . ."

"Have you been listening to the news today? About Russian planes over Europe? Since we had to withdraw foreign aid there's . . ."

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"Yes, dear. But why don't you sit down and have your drink?"

But Bradley couldn't sit down. "Go get the children," he said. "There's something about the world that's . . . restless."

Victor looked terrible. He looked old and tired and apart from things. It was grotesque to see him sitting in a pert little leatherette chair.

"I didn't get you in here to ask for ideas." Link said. "For God's sake, the Depression's over and the war's on. I got you in here to tell you to get the hell out and take a vacation. Half the staff'll get drafted soon and there'll be a terrific manpower shortage. I want you in good shape. And we've got a lull now. Why don't you take your boy up to my lodge for a . . .'

"He joined the navy."

"But he's only a child!"

"I know. I had to sign for him."

"And you did it!" Link was immediately sorry he'd said it.

"This way he gets to be a hero instead of a juvenile delinquent."

Victor shrugged. "I found out something ghastly. He wants me to be proud of him. What would *you* do?"

"Sure, Victor. The navy's a good place for a boy. Make a man of him."

"A dead man. Don't you think I've done a swell job?"

"Come off it. It's not your fault."

"Isn't it?"

"Oh, stop it Llona! It's all over now. And after all, they didn't *suffer*."

NEW WINE IN AN OLD BOTTLE:

Ariadne

Theseus left Ariadne flat:
She never quite got over that.
She married Bacchus? Oh, I think
That simply means she took to drink.

—Leah Bodine Drake

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Our mail tells us that most of you feel as we do about Robert Arthur's byline—it's a form of guarantee that one is about to be most pleasantly entertained. . . . As we think you will be by the following tale of a particularly normal small town, and the particularly abnormal events that occurred in it.

MIRACLE ON MAIN STREET

by Robert Arthur

I

DANNY WAS CROUCHED ON THE stairs, listening to the grown-ups talk in the living room below. He wasn't supposed to be there; he was supposed to be in bed, since he was still recovering from the chicken pox.

But it was lonely being in bed all the time, and he hadn't been able to resist slipping out and down in his wool pajamas, to hear Dad and Mom, and Sis and Uncle Ben and Aunt Anna talking.

Dad—he was Dr. Norcross, and everybody went to him when they were sick—and the others were playing bridge. Sis, who was in high school, was studying her Latin, not so hard she couldn't take part in the conversation.

They were mostly talking about other people in Locustville, which was such a small town most everybody knew everybody else, well enough to talk about them anyway.

"Locustville!" That was Mom, with a sigh. 'I know it's a pretty town, with the river and the trees and the woods around it, and Tom has a good practice here, but the people! If only something would shake some of them out of themselves, and show them how petty and malicious and miserable they are!"

"Like Nettie Peters," Dad said, his tone dry. Danny knew Miss Peters. Always hurrying over to some neighbor's to talk about somebody. Whisper-whisper-whisper. Saying nasty things. "She's the source of most of the gossip in this town. If ever there was a woman whose tongue was hinged in the middle and wagged at both ends, it's her."

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Uncle Ben laughed.

"Things would be better here," he remarked, "if the money were better distributed. If Jacob Earl didn't own or have a mortgage on half the town, there might be more free thought and tolerance. But nobody in debt to him dares open his mouth."

"Funny thing," Dad put in, "how some men have a knack of making money at other men's expense. Everything Jacob Earl touches seems to mint money for him—money that comes out of someone else's pocket. Like that gravel land he got from John Wiggins. I'd like to see the process reversed sometime."

"But for real miserliness"—that was Aunt Anna, indignant—"Luke Hawks takes all the prizes. I've seen him come into the Fair-Square store to buy things for his children, and the trouble he had letting go his money, you'd have thought it stuck to his fingers!"

"It's a question," Dad said, "which is worse, miserliness or shiftlessness. Miserliness, I suppose, because most shiftless people are at least good-hearted. Like Henry Jones. Henry wishes for more things and does less to get them than any man in Christendom. If wishes were horses, Henry would have the biggest herd this side of the Mississippi."

"Well, there are some nice people in Locustville," Sis broke into the conversation. "I don't care what that old gossip Miss Peters says, or that stuck-up Mrs. Norton either; I think Miss Avery, my English and gym teacher, is swell. She isn't awful pretty, but she's nice.

"There's little silver bells in her voice when she talks, and if that Bill Morrow whose dad owns the implement factory, and who takes time off to coach the football team wasn't a dope, he'd have fallen for her long ago. She's crazy about him, but too proud to show it, and that silly Betty Norton has made him think he's wonderful by playing up to him all the time."

"If he marries Betty," Aunt Anna said, "the town won't be able to hold Mrs. Norton any more. She's already so puffed up with being the wife of the bank president and the leader of the town's social life, she'd just swell up a little more and float away like a balloon if she got the Morrow Implement Company for a son-in-law."

Everybody laughed, and the conversation slowly died away.

Mom mentioned how much she disliked that two-faced Minerva Benson who was so nice to people's faces and worked against them behind their backs.

Sis said that Mr. Wiggins, who ran the bookstore, was a nice little man who ought to marry Miss Wilson, the dressmaker, a plain little woman who would be as pretty as a picture if she *looked* the way she *was*.

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But he never would, Sis said, because he hadn't any money and would be ashamed to ask a woman to marry him when he couldn't even earn his own living.

Then they went back to bridge. Danny was feeling sort of weak and shaky, so he hurried back to bed before Mom could catch him. He crawled in and pulled the blankets up over him, and then his hand reached under the pillow and pulled out the funny thing he'd found in the old chest where he kept his games and skates and things.

It had been wrapped in a soft piece of leather, and he had found it in a little space behind one of the drawers. There was a name inked on the leather, *Jonas Norcross*. Dad's grandfather had been named Jonas, so it might have been originally his.

What the thing was was a little pointed piece of ivory, sharp at the tip and round at the bottom, as if it had been sawed off the very end of an elephant's tusk.

Only there was a fine spiral line in it, like in a snail's shell, that made Danny think maybe it hadn't come from an elephant, but from an animal he had seen in a book once—an animal like a horse, with one long horn over its nose. He couldn't remember the name.

It was all yellow with age, and on the bottom was carved a funny mark, all cross lines, very intricate. Maybe it was Chinese writing. Jonas Norcross had been captain of a Clipper ship in the China trade, so maybe it might have come all the way from China.

Lying in bed, Danny held the bit of ivory in his hand. It gave out a warmth to his fingers that was nice. Holding it tight, he thought of a picture in his book about King Arthur's Round Table —a picture of Queen Guinevere of the golden hair. Probably it was a picture like that Sis had meant Miss Wilson ought to be pretty as.

Grown-ups' talk wasn't always easy to understand, the way they said things that weren't so.

Danny yawned. Gee, though, it would be awful funny— He yawned again, and the weight of drowsiness descending on him closed his eyes. But not before one last thought had floated through his mind.

As it came to him, a queer little breeze seemed to spring up in the room. It fluttered the curtains and rattled the window shade. For just a second Danny felt almost as if somebody was in the room with him. Then it was gone, and smiling at his amusing thought, Danny slept.

II

Henry Jones woke that morning with the smell of frying bacon in his nostrils. He yawned and

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stretched, comfortably. There was a clock on the bureau the other side of the room, but it was too much trouble to look at it.

He looked at where the sunshine, coming in the window, touched the carpet. That told him it was just onto nine.

Downstairs pans were rattling. Martha was up and about, long ago. And just about ready to get impatient with him for lingering in bed.

"Ho *huuuum!*" Henry yawned, and pushed down the covers. "I wish I was up an' dressed awready."

As if it were an echo to his yawn, a shrill whickering sound reached him from the direction of his large, untidy backyard. Disregarding it, Henry slid into his trousers and shirt, his socks and shoes, put on a tie, combed his hair casually, and ambled down to the dining room.

"Well!" his wife, Martha, commented tartly, appearing in the doorway with a platter in her hands as he slumped down into his chair. "It's after nine. If you're going to look for work today, you should have been started long ago!"

Henry shook his head dubiously as she set the bacon and eggs in front of him.

"I dunno if I ought to go tramping around today," he muttered. "Don't feel so well. Mmm, that looks good. But I kind of wish we could have sausage oncet in a while."

From the rear yard came another high whinny that went unnoticed.

"Sausage is expensive," Martha told him. "When you get an honest job, maybe we can afford some."

"There's Hawks," Henry remarked, with interest, peering out the front window as a lean, long-faced man strode past the house, with a pleasant but shabbily-dressed little woman trotting meekly at his side. "Guess Emily has talked him into laying out some money for new things for the kids at last. It's only about once a year she gets him to loosen up."

"And then you'd think, to look at him, he was dying," his wife commented, "just because he's buying a couple of pairs of two-dollar shoes for two as nice youngsters as ever lived. He begrudges them every mouthful they eat, almost."

"Still," Henry said, wagging his head wisely, "I wish I had the money he has stacked away."

From the rear yard came a sound of galloping hooves. Martha was too intent on scolding Henry to notice it.

"Wish, wish, wish!" she stormed. "But never work, work, work! Oh, Henry, you're the most exasperating man alive!"

"Martha, I'm not worthy of you," Henry sighed. "I wish you

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had a better husband. I mean it."

This time the whinnying behind the house was a concerted squeal from many throats, too loud to go unnoticed. Henry's buxom wife started, looked puzzled, and hurried out to the kitchen. A moment later her screech reached Henry's ears.

"Henry! The back yard's full of horses! Plunging and kicking all over the place!"

The news was startling enough to overcome Henry's early-morning lethargy. He joined his wife at the kitchen window and stared with popping eyes at the big rear yard.

It was full—anyway, it seemed full—of animals. Martha had called them horses. They weren't exactly horses. But they weren't ponies either. They were too small to be the one and too big to be the other. And they were covered with longish hair, had wild flowing manes, and looked strong and savage enough to lick their weight in tigers.

"Well, I'll be deuced!" Henry exclaimed, his round countenance vastly perplexed. "I wish I knew where those critters came from."

"Henry!" Martha wailed, clutching his arm. "Now there's five!"

There had been four of them, trotting about the yard, nosing at the wreck of the car Henry had once driven, thumping with their hooves the board fence that penned them in. But now there were, indeed, five.

"G-gosh!" Henry gulped, his Adam's apple working up and down. "We must have counted wrong. Now how do you suppose they got in there?"

"But what kind of horses are they, Henry?" Martha asked, holding to his arm still, as if for protection, in a way she hadn't for years. "And who do you suppose they belong to?

Henry put an arm around Martha's plump waist and applied reassuring pressure.

"I wish I knew, Martha," he muttered, "I wish I knew."

"Henry!" There was real fright in his wife's voice. "Now there's six!"

"Seven," Henry corrected weakly. "The other two just—just sort of appeared."

Together they gazed at the seven shaggy ponies that were trotting restlessly about the yard, nosing at the fence as if seeking escape from the limited space.

No more appeared; and seeing the number remain stable, Henry and Martha gained more self-possession.

"Henry," his wife said with severity, as if somehow blaming him, "there's something queer happening. Nobody ever saw horses like those in Indiana before."

"Maybe they belong to a circus," Henry suggested, staring in fascination at the seven uncouth beasts.

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"Maybe they belong to us!"

"Us?" Henry's jaw dropped. "How could they belong to us?"

"Henry," his wife told him, "you've got to go out and see if they're branded. I remember reading anybody can claim a wild horse if it hasn't been branded. And those are wild horses if I ever saw any."

Of course, Martha never *had* seen any wild horses, but her words sounded logical. Her husband, however, made no motion toward the back door.

"Listen," he said, "Martha, you stay here and watch. Don't let anybody into the yard. I'm going to get Jake Harrison, at the stable. He used to be a horse trader. He'll know what those things are and if they belong to us, if anybody does."

"All right, Henry," his wife agreed—the first time he could remember her agreeing with him in, anyway, two years—"but hurry. Please do hurry."

"I will!" Henry vowed; and without even snatching up his hat, he shot away.

Jake Harrison, the livery stable owner, came back with him unwillingly, half dragged in Henry's excitement. But when he stood in the kitchen and stared out at the yard full of horses, his incredulity vanished.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "Henry, where'd you get 'em?"

"Never mind that," Henry told him. "Just tell me, what *are* they?"

"Mongolian ponies," the lanky horse dealer informed him. "The exact kind of ponies old Genghis Khan's men rode on when they conquered most of the known world. I've seen pictures of them in books. Imagine it! Mongolian ponies here in Locustville!"

"Well," Martha asked, with withering scorn, "aren't you going out to see if they're branded? Or are you two men afraid of a lot of little ponies?"

"I guess they won't hurt us," the stable owner decided, "if we're careful. Come on, Henry, let's see if I'm still any good at lassoing. Mis' Jones can I use this hank of clothesline?"

Henry opened the kitchen door and followed Jake Harrison out into the yard. At their advent the seven—he was glad to see the number hadn't changed in his absence—ponies stopped their restless trotting and lifted their heads to stare at the men.

Jake made a noose out of the clothesline and began to circle it above his head. The ponies snorted and reared, suspiciously. Picking the smallest one, the tall man let the noose go, and it settled over the creature's thick neck.

The pony's nostrils flared. It reared and beat the air with its unshod front hooves as the other six broke and scampered to the opposite end of the yard.

Jake Harrison drew the loop

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tight and approached the pony, making soothing sounds. It quieted, and as they came close let Jake put his hands on it.

"Yes, sir," the stable owner exclaimed, "a real honest-to-Homer Mongolian pony. That long hair is to keep the cold out, up in the mountains of Tibet. Now let's see if there's any brand. None on its hide. Let's see its hoof."

The pony let him lift its left forefoot without protest, and Henry, bending close, let out a whoop.

"Look, Jake!" he yelled. "It's branded! With my name! These critters are mine!"

Together they stared. Cut into the hard horn, in neat letters, was HENRY JONES.

Jake straightened.

"Yours, all right," he agreed. "Now, Henry, stop making a mystery and tell me where these animals came from."

Henry's jubilance faded. He shook his head.

"Honest, Jake, I don't know. I wish I did. . . . *Look out!*"

The tall man leaped back. Between them an eighth pony had appeared, so close that its flanks brushed against them.

"W-where—" Jake stuttered, backing away toward the door in the fence and fumbling for the catch. "Where—"

"That's what I don't know!" Henry joined him. "That's what I wish— No, I don't either! I don't wish anything at all!"

The phantom pony that had appeared directly before them, wispy and tenuous as darkish smoke, promptly vanished.

Henry mopped his face.

"Did you see what I saw?" he asked; and Jake, swallowing hard, nodded.

"You st-started to wish for something, and it st-started to appear," he gobbled, and thrust open the door in the board fence. "Let's get out o' here."

"When I started to wish— Oh, jiminy crickets!" Henry groaned. "That's how the others happened. When I wished. Do you suppose— Do you—"

Pale-faced, they stared at each other. Slowly the stableman nodded.

"Lord!" the ashen Henry whispered. "I never believed such a thing could happen. I wish now I'd never—"

This time the words weren't fully out of his mouth before the ninth pony struck the earth with a sudden plop directly before them.

It was too much. Henry broke and ran, and Jake followed at his heels. The pony, interestedly, chased them. Its brothers, not to be left behind, streamed through the opening in the fence, whickering gleefully.

When Henry and Jake brought up, around the corner of the house, they were just in time to look back and see the last of the beasts trotting out into Main

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Street. Nine wicked whinnys cut through the morning quiet. Nine sets of small hooves pounded.

"They're stampeding!" Henry shrilled. "Jake, we got to round 'em up before they do lots of damage. Oh, Jehosephat, I wish this hadn't ever happened!"

Neighing raucously, the tenth pony kicked up its heels, throwing dirt in their faces, and set off at a gallop after the others.

III

About the time Henry Jones was running for Jake Harrison, Luke Hawks was fingering a boy's woolen suit with lean, predatory digits.

"This be the cheapest?" he asked, and being assured that it was—all the clerks in Locustville knew better than to show him anything but the least expensive—nodded.

"I'll take it," he said, and grudgingly reached for his hip pocket.

"Don't you think the material is kind of thin, Luke?" little Emily Hawks asked, a note of pleading in her voice. "Last winter Billy had colds all the time, and Ned —"

The man did not bother to answer. With the well-filled wallet in his left hand, he inserted thumb and forefinger and brought out a twenty-dollar bill.

"Here," he said. "And I've got thirteen dollars forty cents coming."

Taking the bill and starting to turn away, the clerk turned abruptly back. Luke Hawks had snatched the money from his hand.

"Is anything—" he began, and stopped. Testily the man was still holding out the note.

"Take it," he snapped. "Don't make me stand here waiting."

"Yes, sir." The clerk apologized, and took a firmer hold. But he could not take the bill from Luke Hawks. He pulled. Hawks' hand jerked forward. Scowling, the lean man drew his hand back. The money came with it.

"What's the matter, Luke?" Emily Hawks asked. Her husband favored her with a frown.

"Some glue on it, or something," he muttered. "It stuck to my fingers. I'll get another bill out, young man."

He put the twenty back into the wallet—where it went easily enough—and drew out two tens. But neither would these leave his hand.

Luke Hawks was beginning to go a little pale. He transferred the notes to his left hand. But though his left hand could take them from his right, the clerk could take them from neither. Whenever he tugged at it, the money simply would not come loose. It stuck as close to Luke Hawks' fingers as if it were part of his skin.

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A red blush crept into the man's cheeks. He could not meet his wife's gaze.

"I—I dunno—" he muttered. "I'll lay it down. You pick it up."

Carefully he laid a ten dollar bill on the counter, spread his fingers wide, and lifted his hand. To his horror and fright, the bit of green paper came with it, adhering firmly to his finger tips.

"Luke Hawks," his wife said sturdily, "it's a judgment on you. The good Lord has put a curse on your money."

"Hush!" Hawks warned, "Netty Peters has come in the store and is looking. She'll hear you and go gabbing nonsense all—"

"It is not nonsense!" his wife stated. "It's truth. Your money will not leave your fingers."

Luke Hawks went deathly pale again. With a strangled curse, he snatched out all the money in his wallet and tried to throw it down on the counter. To his intense relief, one folded green slip fluttered down, though the rest remained in his hand.

"There!" he gasped. "It ain't so! Boy, how much is that?"

The clerk reached for the paper.

"It—it's a cigar coupon, sir," he reported, his face wooden.

Luke Hawks wilted then. He thrust all his money into the ancient pigskin wallet and being careful his fingers touched only the leather, held it out to his wife.

"Here!" he directed. "You pay him, Emily."

Emily Hawks folded her arms and looked straight into his frightened eyes.

"Luke Hawks," she said in a firm, clear voice that carried through the entire store, "for eight years my life has been made a misery by your mean, grasping ways. Now you can't spend any of your money. You'll starve to death before you can even spend a nickel for bread.

"And I've a good mind to let you. If I don't buy anything for you, you can be sure no one will give it to you. The people of this town would laugh themselves sick seeing you with your hands full of money, begging for a bit to eat. They wouldn't give it to you, either."

Luke Hawks knew they wouldn't. He stared down at his wife, who had never before dared act like this.

"No," he protested. "Emily, don't say that. Here, you take the money. Spend it as you want. Get the things we need. I'll leave it all to you. You—you can even get the next most expensive clothes for the boys."

"You mean you want me to handle the money from now on?" Emily Hawks demanded, and her husband nodded.

"Yes, Emily," he gasped. "Take it. Please take it."

His wife took the wallet—

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which left Luke Hawks' hands readily enough—and counted the money in it.

"Five hundred dollars," she said aloud, thoughtfully. "Luke, hadn't you better give me a check for what you've got in the bank? If I'm to do all the buying, the money'll have to be in my hands."

"A check!" Luke exclaimed. "That's it! I don't need money! I'll pay by check."

"Try it," Emily invited. "That's the same as cash, isn't it?"

Luke tried it. The check would not leave his fingers either. It only tore to pieces when the clerk tugged at it.

After that, he capitulated. He took out his book and signed a blank check, which Emily was able to take. She then filled it in for herself for the entire balance in the bank—twenty thousand dollars, Luke Hawks admitted with strangled reluctance.

After that she tucked the check into the bosom of her dress.

"Now, Luke," she suggested, "you might as well go on home. I'll go to the bank and deposit this to my account. Then I'll do the rest of the shopping. I won't need you."

"But how'll you get the things home?" her husband asked weakly.

Emily Hawks was already almost to the door—out which Netty Peters had just dashed to spread the news through the town. But she paused long enough to turn and smile brightly at her pale and perspiring husband.

"I'll have the man at the garage drive me out with them," she answered. "In the car I'm going to buy after I leave the bank, Luke."

IV

Miss Wilson looked up from her sewing at the sound of galloping hooves in the street outside her tiny shop.

She was just in time to see a small swift figure race by. Then, before she could wonder what it was, she caught sight of herself in the big mirror customers used when trying on the dresses she made.

Her whole name was Alice Wilson. But it was years since anyone had called her by her first name. She was thirty-three, as small and plain as a church mouse—

But she wasn't! Miss Wilson stared open-mouthed at her reflection. She—she wasn't mouse-like any longer. She was—yes, really—almost pretty!

A length of dress goods forgotten in one hand, a needle suspended in mid-air in the other, Alice Wilson stared at the woman in the glass. A small woman, with a smiling, pink and white face, over which a stray lock of golden hair had fallen from the piled-up mass of curls on the top of her head—curls that gave out a soft and shining light.

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The woman in the mirror had soft, warm red lips and blue eyes of sky-azure clearness and depth. Alice Wilson stared, and smiled in sheer delight. The image smiled back.

Wonderingly, Alice touched her face with her fingers. What had happened? What kind of a trick were her eyes playing on her? How—

The clatter of hurrying footsteps made her jump. Netty Peters, her sharp face alight with excitement, her head thrust forward on her skinny neck like a running chicken's, ran in. Miss Wilson's dressmaking shop, the closest place to the Fair-Square store, was her first stop on her tour to spread the news of Luke Hawk's curse.

"Miss Wilson," she gobbled breathlessly, "what do you think —"

"She thinks you've come to spread some scandal or other, that's what she thinks," a shrill file-like voice interrupted.

The voice seemed to come from her own mouth. Netty Peters glared.

"Miss Wilson," she snapped, "if you think ventriloquism is funny when I'm trying to tell you—*just like you're going to tell everybody else!*" the second voice broke in, and Netty Peters felt faint. The words *had* come from her own mouth!

She put her hands to her throat; and because her mind was blank with fright, her tongue went busily ahead with what she had planned to say.

"I saw Luke Hawks—*just like you see everything*"—that was the shrill, second voice, alternating with her own normal one—"in the Fair-Square store and they—*were minding their own business, something you might do*—they were buying clothes for their poor starved children whom they treat so shamefully—*trust you to get that in!*—when Mr. Hawks tried to pay the clerk—*and you were watching to see how much they spent*—the money wouldn't leave his fingers—*did you ever think how many people would be happy if sometimes the words wouldn't leave your throat?*"

The town gossip ceased. Her words had become all jumbled together, making no sense, like two voices trying to shout each other down. There was a strange fluttering in her throat. As if she were talking with two tongues at the same time. . . .

Miss Wilson was staring at her strangely, and Netty Peters saw for the first time the odd radiance in Miss Wilson's hair, the new sweetness in her features.

Incoherent words gurgled in the older woman's throat. Terror glazed her eyes. She turned, and with a queer sobbing wail, fled.

Alice Wilson was still looking after her in bewilderment when another figure momentarily dark-

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ened the doorway. It was Mr. Wiggins, who owned the unprofitable bookstore on the other side of her dressmaking establishment.

Ordinarily Mr. Wiggins was a shy, pale-faced man, his thirty-eight years showing in the stoop of his shoulders, his eyes squinting behind thick glasses. He often smiled, but it was the small, hopeful smile of a man who didn't dare not to smile for fear he might lose heart altogether.

But today, this day of strange happenings, Mr. Wiggins was standing erect. His hair was rumpled, his glasses awry, and his eyes blazing with excitement.

"Miss Wilson!" he cried. "The most amazing thing has happened! I had to tell somebody. I hope you don't mind my bursting in to tell you."

Alice Wilson stared at him, and instantly forgot about the strange thing that had happened to her to be interested in Mr. Wiggin's experience.

"Oh, *no!*" she answered. "Of course I don't. I—I'm glad!"

Outside there were more sounds of galloping hooves, shrill squeals, and men's voices shouting.

"There seems to be a herd of wild ponies loose in the town," Mr. Wiggins told Miss Wilson. "One almost knocked me down, racing along the sidewalk as I was coming here. Miss Wilson, you'll never believe it, what I was going to tell you. You'll have to see for yourself. Then you won't think I'm mad."

"Oh, I'd never think that!" Miss Wilson assured him.

Scarcely hearing her, Mr. Wiggins seized her by the hand and almost dragged her to the door. A rush of warm pleasure rose into Miss Wilson's cheeks at the touch of his hand.

A little breathless, she ran beside him, out the shop door, down a dozen yards, and into the gloom of his tiny, empty bookstore.

On the way, she barely had a glimpse of three or four shaggy ponies snorting and wheeling further up the street, with Henry Jones and Jake Harrison, assisted by a crowd of laughing men and boys, trying to catch them.

Then Mr. Wiggins, trembling with excitement, was pushing her down into an old overstuffed chair.

"Miss Wilson," he said tensely, "I was sitting right here when in came Jacob Earl, not fifteen minutes ago. You know how he walks —big and pompous, as if he owned the earth. I knew what he wanted. He wanted the thousand dollars I owe him, that I borrowed to buy my stock of books with. And I—I didn't have it. None of it.

"You remember when my aunt died last year, she left me that property down by the river that I sold to Jacob Earl for five hundred dollars? He pretended he was just doing me a favor buying it, to help me get started in business.

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"But then high grade gravel was discovered on the land, and now it's worth at least fifteen thousand dollars. I learned Earl knew about the gravel all the time. But in spite of that, he wanted the thousand he loaned me."

"Yes, oh yes!" Miss Wilson exclaimed. "He would. But what did you *do,* Mr. Wiggins?"

Mr. Wiggins combed back his disheveled hair with his fingers.

"I told him I didn't have it. And he took out his glove—his right glove—and told me if I didn't have it by tomorrow, he'd have to attach all my books and fixtures. And then he put his hand down on top of my little brass Chinese luck piece. And guess what happened?"

"Oh, I couldn't!" Miss Wilson whispered. "I never could!"

"Look!" Mr. Wiggins' voice trembled. He snatched up a large dust cloth that hid something on the counter just before Miss Wilson's eyes. Underneath the cloth was a squat little Chinese god, about a foot high, sitting with knees crossed and holding a bowl in his lap.

On his brass countenance was a sly smile, and his mouth was open in a round O of great amusement.

And as Miss Wilson stared at him, a small gold coin popped out of the little god's mouth and landed with a musical chink in the bowl in his lap!

Alice Wilson gasped. "Oh, John!" she cried, using Mr. Wiggins' Christian name for the first time in her life. "Is it—is it money?"

"Chinese money," Mr. Wiggins told her. "And the bowl is full of it. It's filled just since I ran over to get you. One comes out of his mouth every second. The first one came out right after Mr. Earl put his hand on the god's head. Look!"

He scooped up the contents of the bowl and held them out, let them rain into Miss Wilson's lap. Incredulously she picked one up.

It was a coin as large perhaps as an American nickel. In the center was punched a square hole. All around the edges were queer Oriental ideographs. And the piece of money was as fresh and new and shiny as if it had just come from the mint.

"Is it real gold?" she asked tremulously.

"Twenty carats pure at least!" John Wiggins assured her. "Even if it is Chinese money, the coins must be worth five dollars apiece just for the metal. And look—the bowl is half full again."

They stared wide-eyed and breathless at the little grinning god. Every second, as regularly as clockwork, another gold coin popped out of his open mouth.

"It's as if—as if he were coining them!" John Wiggins whispered.

"Oh, it's wonderful!" Alice Wilson told him, with rapture. "John

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I'm so glad! For your sake. Now you can pay off Earl."

"In his own coin!" the man chortled. "Because he started it happening, you know, so you could call it his own coin. Perhaps he pressed a secret spring or something that released them from where they were hidden inside the god. I don't know.

"But the funny thing is, he couldn't pick them up! He tried to pretend he had just dropped the first couple, but they rolled out of the bowl and right across the floor when he reached for them. And then he began to get frightened. He grabbed up his hat and his glove and ran out."

Then John Wiggins paused. He was looking down at Alice Wilson, and for the first time he really saw the change that had occurred in her.

"Why—why" he said, "do you know, you hair is the same color as the coins?"

"Oh, it isn't!" Miss Wilson protested, blushing scarlet at the first compliment a man had paid her in ten years.

"It is," he insisted. "And you, you're lovely, Alice. I never realized before how lovely. You're pretty as —as pretty as a picture!"

He looked down into her eyes, and without taking his gaze away, reached down and took her hands in his. He drew her up out of the chair, and still crimsoning with pleasure, Alice Wilson faced him.

"Alice," John Wiggins said, "Alice, I've known you for a long time, and I've been blind. I guess worry blinded me. Or I'd have known what I've just realized. I know I'm not much of a success as a man but—but Alice, would you be my wife?"

Alice Wilson gave a little sigh and rested her face against his shoulder so that he might not see the tears in her eyes. Happiness had mostly eluded her until now but this moment more than made up for all the years that were past.

John Wiggins put his arms about her, and behind them the little god grinned and went busily on with his minting. . . .

Jacob Earl stamped into his library in his home and locked the door behind him, with fingers that shook a little.

Throwing his hat and stick down, with his gloves, onto a chair, he groped for a cigar in his desk and lit it, by sheer force of will striving to quell the inward agitation that was shaking him.

But— Well, any man might feel shaken if he had put his hand down on a cold brass paperweight and had felt the thing twist in his grip as if alive, had felt a shock in his fingers like a sudden discharge of electricity, and then had seen the thing start to spout gold money.

Money—and Jacob Earl gazed down at his soft, plump white hands almost with fright—which

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had *life* in it. Because when he had tried to pick it up, it had eluded him. It had *dodged*.

Angrily he flung away his barely smoked cigar. Hallucinations! He'd been having a dizzy spell, or—or something. Or Wiggins had fixed up a trick to play on him. That was it, a trick!

The nerve of the man, giving him such a start! When he had finished with the little rabbit he—he—

Jacob Earl did not quite formulate what he would do. But the mere thought of threatening somebody made him feel better. He'd decide later what retaliation he would make.

Right now, he'd get to work. He'd inventory his strong box. Nothing like handling hard, tangible possessions, like stocks and bonds and gold, to restore a man's nerves when he felt shaky.

He spun the combination of his safe, swung open the heavy outer door, unlocked the inner door, and slid out first a weighty steel cash box locked by a massive padlock.

Weighty, because it held the one thing a man couldn't have too much of—gold. Pure gold ingots, worth five hundred dollars each. Fifteen thousand dollars' worth of them.

He'd had them since long before the government called in gold. And he was going to keep them, government or no. If he ever had to sell them, he'd claim they'd been forgotten, and found by accident.

Jacob Earl flung open the lid of his gold cache. And his overly ruddy face turned a sudden pallid gray. Two of the ingots in the top layer were missing!

But no one could get into his safe. No one but himself. It wasn't possible that a thief—

Then the gray turned to ashen white. His eyes started, his breath caught in his throat. As he stared, a third ingot had vanished. Evaporated. Into thin air. As if an unseen hand had closed over it and snatched it away.

But it wasn't possible! Such a thing couldn't happen.

And then the fourth ingot vanished. Transfixed by rage and fright, he put his hands down on the remaining yellow bars an pressed with all his might.

But presently the fifth of his precious chunks of metal slipped away from beneath his very fingers into nothingness. One instant it was there, and he could feel it. Then—gone!

What a hoarse cry, Jacob Earl dropped the cash box. He stumbled across the room to his telephone, got a number.

"Doctor?" he gasped. "Doctor Norcross? This is Jacob Earl. I—I—"

Then he bethought himself. This couldn't happen. This was madness. If he told anyone—

"Never mind, doctor!" he blurted. "Sorry to have troubled you. It's all right."

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He hung up. And sat there, all the rest of the day, sweat beading his brow, watching the shiny yellow oblongs that had fallen on the floor vanish one by one.

In another part of town, another hand crept toward the telephone—and drew back. Minerva Benson's hand. Minerva Benson had discovered her deformity almost the instant she had arisen, late that morning. The stiff, lifeless face affixed to the back of her head now. Thin, vicious, twisted, the features of a harpy.

With trembling fingers she touched it again, in a wild hope that it might have vanished. Then she huddled closer on the end of the sofa in the darknened room, whose door was locked, blinds drawn.

She couldn't telephone. Because no one must see her like this. No one. Not even a doctor. . . .

And in her tiny, spinsterish home Netty Peters also crouched, alone, and also afraid to telephone.

Feared, lest that strange, dreadful second voice begin to clack and rattle in her throat when she tried to talk, tried to ask Doctor Norcross to come.

Crouched, and felt her throat with fingers like frantic claws. And was sure she could detect something moving in her throat like a thing alive.

V

Mrs. Edward Norton moved along the tree-shaded streets toward the downtown section of Locustville with all the self-conscious pride of a frigate entering a harbor under full sail.

She was a full-bodied woman—well-built, she phrased it—and expensively dressed. Certainly the best-dressed woman in town, as befitted her position as leader of Locustville's social life and the most influential woman in town.

And today she was going to use her influence. She was going to have Janice Avery discharged as teacher in the high school.

Distinctly she had seen the young woman *smoking* in her room, the previous evening, as she happened to be driving by. A woman who should be an example to the children she taught.

Mrs. Norton sailed along, indignation high in her. She had called first at Minerva Benson's home. Minerva was a member of the school board. But Minerva had said she was sick, and refused to see her.

Then she had tried Jacob Earl, the second member of the board. And he had been ill too.

It was odd.

Now she was going directly to the office of Doctor Norcross. He was head of the school board. Not the kind of man she approved of for the position, of course—

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Mrs. Norton paused. For the ast few moments she had been xperiencing a strange sensation f puffiness, of lightness. Was she l too? Could she be feeling light-eaded or dizzy?

But no, she was perfectly nor-al. Just a moment's upset per-aps, from walking too fast.

She continued onward. What ad she been thinking? Oh, yes, octor Norcross. An able physi-an, perhaps, but his wife was eally quite—well, dowdy. . . .

Mrs. Norton paused again. A ntle breeze was blowing down ie street and she—she was being vayed from side to side by it. Ac-tally, it was almost pushing her f balance!

She took hold of a convenient mp post. That stopped her from vaying. But—

She stared transfixed at her fin-ers. They were swollen and uffy.

Her rings were cutting into iem painfully. Could she have me awful—

Then she became aware of a rained, uncomfortable feeling all ver her person. A feeling of being nfined, intolerably pent-up in er clothing.

With her free hand she began pat herself, at first with puz-lement, then with terror. Her othing was as tight on her as ie skin of a sausage. It had irunk! It was cutting off her cir-ulation!

No, it hadn't. That wasn't true. She was growing! Puffing up! Fill-ing out her clothes like a slowly expanding balloon.

Her corset was confining her diaphragm, making it impossible to breathe. She couldn't get air into her lungs.

She had some awful disease. That was what came of living in a dreadful, dirty place like Lo-custville, among backward, ignor-ant people who carried germs and—

At that instant the laces of Mrs. Norton's corsets gave way. She could actually feel herself swell, bloat, puff out. Her arms were queer and hard to handle. The seams of her dress were giving way.

The playful breeze pushed her, and she swayed back and forth like a midnight drunk staggering homeward.

Her fingers slipped from the lamp post.

And she began to rise slowly, ponderously into the air, like a runaway balloon.

Mrs. Edward Norton screamed. Piercingly. But her voice seemed lost, a thin wail that carried hard-ly twenty yards. This was unthink-able. This was impossible!

But it was happening.

Now she was a dozen feet above the sidewalk. Now twenty. And at that level she paused, spinning slowly around and around, her arms flopping like a frightened

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chicken's wings, her mouth opening and closing like a feeding goldfish's, but no sounds coming forth.

If anyone should see her now! Oh, if anyone should see her!

But no one did. The street was quite deserted. The houses were few, and set well back from the street. And the excitement downtown, the herd of strange ponies that all day had been kicking up their heels as they dodged in and out of alleys, whinnying and squealing as Henry Jones and his volunteer assistants tried to pen them up, had drawn every unoccupied soul in Locustville.

Mrs. Norton, pushed along by the gentle breeze, began to drift slowly northward toward the town limits.

Tree branches scraped her and ripped her stockings as she clutched unavailingly at them. A crow, attracted by the strange spectacle, circled around her several times, emitted a raucous squawk that might have been amusement, and flew off.

A stray dog, scratching fleas in the sunshine, saw her pass overhead and followed along underneath for a moment, barking furiously.

Mrs. Norton crimsoned with shame and mortification. Oh, if anyone saw her!

But if no one saw her, no one could help her. She did not know whether to pray for someone to come along or not. She was unhurt. Perhaps nothing worse was going to happen.

But to be sailing placidly through the air, twenty feet above the street, puffed up like a balloon!

The breeze had brought her out to a district marked for subdivision, but still vacant. Fruit trees grew upon the land. The playful wind, shifting its quarter, altered her course. In a moment she was drifting past the upper branches of gnarled old apple trees, quite hidden from the street.

Her clothes were torn, her legs and arms scratched, her hair straggling down her back. And her indignation and fear of being seen began to give way to a sensation of awful helplessness. She, the most important woman in Locustville, to be blowing around among a lot of old fruit trees for crows to caw at and dogs to bark at and—

Mrs. Norton gasped. She had just risen another three feet.

With that she began to weep.

The tears streamed down her face. All at once she felt humble and helpless and without a thought for her dignity or her position. She just wanted to get down,

She just wanted to go home and have Edward pat her shoulder and say, "There, there," as he used to —a long time ago—while she had a good cry on his shoulder.

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She was a bad woman, and being punished for it. She had been puffed up with pride, and this was what came of it. In the future, if ever she got down safely, she'd know better.

As if influenced by the remorseful thoughts, she began to descend slowly. Before she was aware of it, she had settled into the upper branches of a cherry tree, scaring away a flock of indignant robins.

And there she caught.

She had quite a lot of time in which to reflect before she saw Janice Avery swinging past along a short cut from the school to her home, and called to her. . . .

Janice Avery got her down. With the aid of Bill Morrow, who was the first person she could find when she ran back to the school to get aid.

Bill was just getting into his car to drive out to the football field, where he was putting the school team through spring practice, when she ran up; and at first he did not seem to understand what she was saying.

As a matter of fact, he didn't. He was just hearing her voice—a voice that was cool and sweet and lovely, like music against a background of distant silver bells.

Then, when he got it, he sprang into action.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Mrs. Norton stuck up a tree picking cherries? I can't believe it."

But he got a ladder from the school and brought it, gulping at the sight of the stout, tearful woman caught in the crotch of the cherry tree.

A few moments later they had her down. Mrs. Norton made no effort to explain beyond the simple statement she had first made to Janice.

"I was picking cherries and I just got stuck."

Wild as it was, it was better than the truth.

Bill Morrow brought his car as close as he could and Janice hurried her out to it, torn, scratched, bedraggled, red-eyed. They got her in without anyone seeing and drove her home.

Mrs. Norton sobbed out a choked thanks and fled into the house, to weep on the shoulders of her surprised husband.

Bill Morrow mopped his forehead and looked at Janice Avery. She wasn't pretty, but— Well, there was something in her face. Something swell. And her voice. A man could hear a voice like that all his life and not grow tired of it.

"Lord!" he exclaimed, as he slid behind the wheel of his car. "And Betty Norton is going to look just like that some day. Whew! Do you know, I'm a fool. I actually once thought of— But never mind. Where can I take you?"

He grinned at her, and Janice Avery smiled back, little happy lines springing into life around the corners of her lips.

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"Well," she began, as the wide-shouldered young man kicked the motor into life, "you have to get to practice—"

"Practice is out!" Bill Morrow told her with great firmness, and let in the clutch. "We're going some place and talk!"

She sat back, content.

VI

The sun was setting redly as Dr. Norcross closed his office and swung off homeward with a lithe step.

It had been a strange day. Darned strange. Wild ponies had been running through the town since morning, madly chased by the usually somnolent Henry Jones. From his window he had seen into the bookstore across the street and distinctly perceived John Wiggins and Alice Wilson embracing.

Then there had been that abortive phone call from an obviously agitated Jacob Earl. And he had positively seen Mrs. Luke Hawks going past in a brand new car, with a young man at the wheel who seemed to be teaching her to drive. Whew!

There would be a lot to tell his wife tonight.

His reflections were cut short as he strode past Henry Jones' backyard, which lay on his homeward short-cut route.

A crowd of townsfolk were gathered about the door in the fence around the yard, and Dr. Norcross could observe others in the house, peering out the windows.

Henry and Jake Harrison, mopping their faces with fatigue, stood outside peering into the yard through the cautiously opened doorway. And over the fence itself, he was able to see the tossing heads of many ponies, while their squeals cut the evening air.

"Well, Henry"—that was Martha, who came around the corner of the house and pushed through the crowd about her husband—"you've rounded up all the horses all right. But how're you going to pay for the damage they did today? Now you'll have to go to work, in spite of yourself. Even if they aren't good for anything else they've accomplished *that!*"

There was an excitement on Henry's face Dr. Norcross had never seen there before.

"Sure, Martha, sure," he agreed. "I know I'll have to pay off the damage. But Jake and me, we've got plans for these hooved jackrabbits. Know what we're going to do?"

He turned, so all of the gathered crowd could hear his announcement.

"Jake and me, we're going to use that land of Jake's south of town to breed polo ponies!" he declared. "Yes, sir, we're going to cross these streaks of lightning

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with real polo ponies. We're gonna get a new breed with the speed of a whippet, the endurance of a mule, and the intelligence of a human.

"Anybody who seen these creatures skedaddle around town today knows that when we get a polo pony with their blood in it developed, it'll be something! Yes, sir, something! I wish—

"No I don't! I don't wish anything! Not a single, solitary thing! I'm not gonna wish for anything ever again, either!"

Norcross grinned. Maybe Henry had something there.

Then, noting that the sun had just vanished, he was home.

VII

Up in his room, Danny Norcross woke groggily from a slumber that had been full of dreams. Half asleep still, he groped for and found the little piece of ivory he had kept beside him ever since he had fallen asleep the night before.

His brow wrinkled. He had been on the stair, listening to the grown-ups talk. They had said a lot of queer things. About horses, and money, and pictures. Then he had gotten back in bed. And played with his bit of ivory for awhile.

Then he had had a funny thought, and sort of a wish—

The wish that had passed through his mind, as he had been falling asleep, had been that all the things Dad and Mom and the others had said would come true, because it would be so funny if they did.

So he had wished that just for one day, maybe, all Henry Jones' wishes would be horses, and money would stick to Luke Hawks' fingers, and Jacob Earl would touch something that would coin money for somebody else for a change.

And, too, that Netty Peters' tongue really would be hinged in the middle and wag at both ends, and Mrs. Benson have two faces, and Mrs. Norton swell up and blow around like a balloon.

And that Miss Wilson would really be as pretty as a picture, and you could truly hear silver bells when Miss Avery talked.

That had been his wish. But now, wide awake and staring out the window at a sky all red because the sun had set, he couldn't quite remember it, try as he would. . . .

Crouched in her darkened room, Minerva Benson felt the back of her head for the hundredth time. First with shuddering horror, then with hope, then with incredulous relief. The dreadful face on the back of her head was gone now.

But she would remember it, and be haunted by it forever in her dreams.

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Netty Peters stared at herself in her mirror, her eyes wide and frightened. Slowly she took her hands from her throat. The queer fluttering was gone. She could talk again without that terrible voice interrupting.

But always after, when she began to speak, she would stop abruptly for fear it might sound again, in the middle of a sentence.

"I've decided, Luke," Mrs. Luke Hawks said with decision, "that we'll have the house painted and put in a new furnace. Then I'm going to take the children off on a little vacation.

"No, don't say anything! Remember, the money is in my name now, and I can spend it all, if I've a mind to. I can take it and go away to California, or any place.

"And no matter what you say or do, I'm not going to give it back!"

Jacob Earl uttered a groan. The last gold ingot had just vanished from the floor of his library.

John Wiggins turned. The tiny *chink-chink* that had sounded all afternoon had ceased. The little god still grinned, but the coins were no longer coming from his mouth.

"He's quit," the little man announced to the flushed and radiant Alice Wilson. "But we don't care. Look how much money came out of him. Why there must be fifteen thousand dollars there!

"Alice, we'll take a trip around the world. And we'll take him back to China, where he came from. He deserves a reward."

With the red afterglow tinting the little lake beside which he had parked the car, Bill Morrow turned. His arm was already about Janice Avery's shoulders.

So it really wasn't any effort for him to draw her closer and kiss her, firmly, masterfully.

The door to Danny's room opened. He heard Dad and Mom come in, and pretended for a minute that he was asleep.

"He's been napping all day," Mom was saying. "He hardly woke up enough to eat breakfast. I guess he must have lain awake late last night. But his fever was down, and he didn't seem restless, so I didn't call you."

"We'll see how he is now," Dad's voice answered; and Danny, who had closed his eyes to try to remember better, opened them again.

Dad was bending over his bed.

"How do you feel, son?" he asked.

"I feel swell," Danny told him, and struggled to a sitting position. "Look what I found yester-

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day in my box. What is it, Dad?"

Doctor Norcross took the piece of ivory Danny held out, and looked at it.

"I'll be darned!" he exclaimed to his wife. "Danny's found the old Chinese talisman Grandfather Jonas brought back on the last voyage of the *Yankee Star*. He gave it to me thirty years ago. Told me it had belonged to a Chinese magician.

"It's peculiar power, he said, was that if you held it tight, you could have one wish come true, providing—as the Chinese inscription on the bottom says—your mind was pure, your spirit innocent, and your motive unselfish.

"I wished on it dozens of times, but nothing ever happened. Guess it was because I was too materialistic and wished for bicycles and things.

"Here, Danny, you can keep it. But take good care of it. It's very old; even the man who gave it to Grandfather Jonas didn't know how old it was."

Danny took back the talisman.

"I made a wish, Dad," he confessed.

"So?" Dad grinned. "Did it come true?"

"I don't know," Danny admitted. "I can't remember what it was."

Dad chuckled.

"Then I guess it didn't come true," he remarked. "Never mind; you can make another. And if that one doesn't happen either, don't fret. You can keep the talisman and tell people the story. It's a good story, even if it isn't so."

Probably it wasn't so. It was certain that the next time Danny wished, nothing happened. Nor any of the times after that. So that by and by he gave up trying.

He was always a little sorry, though, that he never could remember that first wish, made when he was almost asleep.

But he never could. Not even later, when he heard people remarking how much marriage had improved Alice Wilson's appearance and how silvery Mrs. Bob Morrow's voice was.

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Unus is-was-will-be a world of a very large number of possibilities. Not an infinite number of possibilities, however, because one of the possibilities is-was-will-be probability—obviously a possibility to be avoided, if possible. . . .

THE REVENANT

by Raymond E. Banks

I KNOW THERE IS SOMETHING wrong with me. Every morning in the cool, blue dawn I have the same hallucination. It is this: I am in a space ship (I, Dax, who have never been in a space ship that I remember), in a long gray room. It is provided with algae for ozygen—this morning the oxygen is thick and sweet like syrup. The morning machinery-sound of the ship thumps and buzzes to itself. Then I walk across this long, gray, cheerful room. There is a man of my own age on either side of me. We pause at a table. I think it is a ritual table, a breakfast ritual table, where lie delicate slivers of orange morning sun.

Then a tall woman with dark hair, and wearing a robe which could be a uniform, comes on down the room. She carries a vase with some white lilies in it.

When she reaches the table, she smiles at us. I notice that the eyes are a startling middle blue, while her hair is black. She says words that I do not hear. There is far-off laughter, but the laughter rides above the nervousness in us—this is a day for a great adventure and our fingers are cold.

Then she dips her hands into the vase, takes out a flower and pins one each on our uniforms. Most startling of all is the whiteness and shaped perfection of her hands in the clear-crystal water, the living shade of green of the stems and the white of the blossoms. The scene is an incredible tableau—morning sun and orange-tinted table, soft blue eyes, graceful hands, diamond-like water, and the green-and-cathedral white of the flowers.

It is an absolute that could not exist in my world—you can see the contradictions at once.

First there are no women on this planet Unus, so that I shouldn't even be able to conceive of

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one. True, there is a Dax-projection, so that I may translate her into a woman. Second, there is no machinery on Unus larger than the twenty-pound limit, so how could I conceive a space ship? Breakfast is an unknown meal to us, so how do I know the word?

But last, note the sequence of events. Men go into room, approach table. Woman enters room, walks to table with flowers, smiles, takes flower and pins on each in turn.

This ordered sequence of events never changes. Now in all Unus or in all of the planets of the greater sun (during the times we have a sun, which is not absolute, of course) there is no such thing as an ordered run of events.

On Unus the woman sometimes would enter the room. Sometimes there would be two men, sometimes four, sometimes one. The flowers would change or disappear. Certainly a table, an inanimate object, most of all subject to change in our possibility world would not appear unchanged over and over.

This morning I have a task to perform, and I also have a headache for the illusion of woman and table was especially strong. I go to the window and leap out lightly. I do not soar well today. I notice the gravity has changed during the night. We again approach a redirection—you can sense it in the air. Other people have trouble with the gravity this morning. Ste, my neighbor to the left soars as badly as I. We greet each other stonily as we select our breakfast (that meaningless word again!) from the breakfast floats that ride the sky.

"Redirection," I say, trying to balance with one arm flailing.

"Most surely," says Ste.

"I am sorry. I like this directive. I have never been so rich or so highly placed in any directive in memory."

"I don't remember the other directives so well," says Ste. "It's better not to remember sequences. How's your wife-projection? And the children-projections?"

I look back at my apartment window a hundred and forty feet above me, with fondness. "Very fine. I held them dearly until the last moment, when I had to obliterate them until this evening. Yours?"

"I hate myself today," he says. "Therefore I had a nasty argument with my wife-projection, and one of my children had a bad cold. I think I'm catching it." He sneezed.

"Better dematerialize that child a few days till he gets better."

He nods, an ironic smile on his lips. "Will do. Except if the child happens to be on the directive, in which case he is the probability, I merely a possibility, and he may rid himself of me."

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"Well, Up and Down," I say.

"Down and Up," he answers and flies off glumly to work, fumbling with his big brown briefcase, and inevitably sinking due to the gravity change.

I settle to my office pavilion in the Park, near a pleasant stream. We have blue grass today, I note with pleasure. I always have good days when the grass is blue, and thank the Revenant. I take off my shoes, put my feet in the cool morning water, a delicate pink, and wiggle my toes as I tackle my paper work.

I can tell the sequence is running down. I am Deputy Mayor of this city, Orlo; now I see that during the shift in the night I am Police Commissioner as well. A second job added to my Deputy Mayor job and I haven't even met my boss, the Mayor. Well, tolay, tolay, I have never been thus before. Possibly I shall like it, so let's hope the sequence lasts a little longer.

Two policemen bring a wretched young man before me. "Sir, Sla, this criminal attacked his wife-projection with a knife and killed her. He then attempted to set fire to and destroy his fine apartment."

There is an unmarked place on the arrest-paper for his plea.

"Plea?" I ask.

He stares at me with quite mad eyes. There is something about him which is extremely disturbing.

"For God's sake, Henry Daniels!" he cries. "Remember me! I'm George Slade. Your partner—off the space ship. Before we got mixed up with this fruity world. Remember—George Slade."

"It is probable that you are George Slade, and that I am Henry Daniels," I say. "At least we were in some other directive. Certainly not in this directive. In this directive it is against the law to destroy your wife-projection—"

I pause and dig out a law book from under my chair. It reads as follows: "Women are probably real, existing during the night and early morning until a man goes to work. Therefore the penalty for destroying them is death, from five P.M. to eight A.M."

"How do you plead—Sla?" I ask him.

In answer he lunges at me fiercely so that the men in gray-green have to restrain him.

"Evening death," I order. "Tomorrow morning take him to his Revenant. He is too lossy in this directive."

"Henry! Please!" he begs. "Remember our assignment—remember the space ship? Remember our training to enter the possibility world?"

I shake my head. All I know is, it is bad on the nerves to carry memory of prior directives. Or later ones. Sla may be approaching a dangerous null point.

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He gives a cry of pain as they take him off. "Clarissa—remember Clarissa!" he cries.

The name gives me a start; pale hands in crystal waters flash in my mind.

But I am Police Commissioner. "Do not fear, old friend. In another directive you might probably sentence me. Probably even to full-time death. All balances in Unus, my good friend."

I feel sad after that. I feel that Sla may have pulled me down, with his talk of long, foreign names. That my own system may be getting lossy, with my hallucination of the ordered sequence.

Still everyone is irritable. The sequence seems to have slowed down. The sun creeps, watches creep. It is eight hours until the lunch break, when the sandwiches pop out of the blue grass from the underground channels, and the drink trays float down the streams of the office pavilion.

Everyone watches the main street to see if the Revenants are coming to Congress. When the directive runs down they will Congress for the new one.

I contemplate all of the things I have been, or thought I was. Butcher, beggar, maker of atom-sticks. Never have I been so high in government, Deputy Mayor and also Police Commissioner. Today my fellow-workers bow to me and want me to smile on them. Tomorrow, I might be a thief, or neurotic or die a death of horrible mangling. Still I had fun in those old directives. You can't hardly get those kind of directives anymore, like when I was younger or older than I am now.

Or maybe you get more discriminating as you remember more. What suicide is this that I recall so much of the old things? Next thing you know I'll be gumming along about how there ought to be absolutes, like a young baby, or an old man.

No! The moment. The glorious moment of now!

And again, as I see a pale lavender flower in the park, I think of the lilies and the space ship and Clarissa. Is it probable? Is it probable that there is another universe where things change slowly or not at all? Is unbroken, sequential order probable?

Instinct says "no," yet on Unus in our tentative (thank God!) lives, all possibilities exist, including an ordered, seldom changing universe. What wretched creatures would live in such a world, nailed to their positions, their bodies, their little-changing personalities year after year? Certainly, this is the hell that the sin-chasers preach to us about.

Before lunch is over a Revenant's messenger comes into the Park. I don't think anything about it, and stare at him, like everybody else until it turns out he wants to see me.

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"Dax, you are rigidly enforced to come to the Revenants' Temple," he says to me with a bow.

I enter the Temple of the Revenants with something of awe. I don't believe I've ever been in the gigantic place before. It exists in some form in all the directives.

We are met at the door by a Temple Wardress. These are more solid woman projections than our wives. They seem to be of the age of twenty. Clean of limb, graceful of movement. Also short of clothing.

For a moment I get another flicker of a woman's hands with the lilies. But the flicker is weak compared to the beauty of the girl in front of me. As I watch, her hair transforms gloriously from a soft, fluffy blonde-white to a rich brown. Her eyes of lake-blue, merge and twinkle into a hazel, then a deep brown, finally a velvet black.

I stare at her with some interest. In one directive, somewhere, we had sex, whatever that is. I am hazy as to the particulars, but it seemed important that men be men and women be women. Among women, it seemed that to have a high chest and a round rear, a clear skin and a curved leg held value. It must've been pleasure-strong, because I blush to see this girl. I enjoy the short, young lift of her lip in her smile. I enjoy watching her as I follow her.

In fact, I miss a short stairway and start to fall in my carelessness. I put my hand on her shoulder to steady myself. I am glad to be careless, glad that I have to put a hand on her shoulder if even briefly.

There is no waiting in the anteroom of the Chamber. We proceed directly into a vault that is so vast that I catch my breath. There are drapes on the wall of blood red, at least two hundred feet tall. Woven into the drapes are incredible designs that flicker in the sturdy, filtered sunlight from aloft. It seems that the drapes tell a story of a past directive or a directive yet to come, a shimmering totality of possibles. But it would take incredible mountains of time to unravel the exciting suggestions. . . .

The Congress of Revenants sit in serious rows at the foot of a massive velvet dais. From his height on the dais the Chief Revenant looks down upon my guide and me. He smiles a thanks to my guide who floats away, now a gloss-haired red-head, now without a stitch of clothes on.

Silence holds the chamber until she is gone—then a sigh ripples across the roomful of men.

I now notice that two other men stand before the dais.

"Your name is Henry Daniels," says the Chief Revenant staring down at me. "By your side you see George Slade."

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I turn and see, indeed, the unfortunate young chap that I sentenced to night-time death, who had told me about our names.

"Here," says the Chief Revenant, "is Professor Murchison."

I bow to him.

"It turns out," says the Chief Revenant, "that you are all Earthmen, visiting our planet of Unus, the world of possibility only, where all possibilities are fulfilled and nothing can happen—at least that can't unhappen again."

"If this is a directive, I accept it," I say. "As a high official in this directive, I am pleased to approve it."

"No, really," says the Chief Revenant angrily. "You mustn't agree with me so readily. A large problem exists, since it turns out that Earthmen, so-called, come from a world of probables. They have a ninety-eight to ninety-nine per cent world. They have each one life, one span of time, one set of senses, one birth, one death."

"They have been sadly tricked," I reply.

"Professor Murchison tells us that he comes from a space ship that lies outside our planet, when our planet exists, which is only part of the time, and that you three have come here to explore us," the Revenant continues.

"As Deputy Mayor, and in the absence of the Mayor whom I've never met," I say to Professor Murchison, "I should like officially to welcome you Earthmen to Unus, including George Slade and me. This afternoon I shall issue a proclamation naming this "Earth-Week on Unus," but with the directive acting lossy, I had better hold it to only "Earth-day."

"You talk too much," says the CR.

I bow.

"Now," says the Revenant. "We have a problem—that you Earthmen 'probables' can enter into Unus only along possibility lines, strictly limited by your rules to that weensy two per cent of the unlikely by the rules of your world. We, on the other hand, can embrace a large amount of probability up to a fifty per cent, but not over that, or our world would turn into a probability world at fifty point one."

I bow.

"The three of you have put a heavy drag on our system," the CR goes on. "There is friction. This means a freezing all along the situational events, causing a rapid turn-over of directives. The upshot is, you are digging too heavily into our reserves of possibility directives. This is our only natural resource on Unus, so we must eliminate the friction, namely you."

Something in me freezes. I turn to Professor Murchison. "What am I in this other sad, gray world, friend?"

"Henry Daniels, a soldier, a

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guard," he says. "You also play poker and get too fresh with Clarissa, the hostess of our ship."

"Here I am Deputy Mayor," I point out. "If I encounter enough directives I may cancel myself out by being my own father or son too many times, or I may survive enough of them finally to achieve stability and become a Revenant."

"What happiness in that?" groans George Slade speaking for the first time. "I miss Clarissa."

"My choice for happiness is the conceiving of life-action," I respond. "In what other world can a man conceive all things, *all* things he might be, and have them finally happen."

One of the temple girls moves across the chamber, carrying a large bowl of steaming soup, evidently in preparation for the evening meal. She carries her portion high, her figure gleaming in nothing but a mantle of running water, flowing over her skin as if she'd stepped from a pool, her smile lovely, her head haloed as she walks.

I stop talking as none are listening. I do not hear my last words myself.

We pay tribute with a collective sigh.

"*All* things he might be," I say. "Think of the waste of noble conceptions in your world, where a man might conceive being a mighty president or a clever thief, but never finding the reality. Here we have total conception and total function to follow it. You—Professor Murchison. You return?"

"I return," said Murchison.

"You report this world to Earth?" I ask.

"I do *not* report," said Murchison. "I would be scoffed at both in the Academy and the press. Instead I write a book which is released at my death, and one hundred years later revered. To me this seems a form of happiness."

There is silence in the Chamber, while we all reflect that on Unus, Professor Murchison would be able to live a hundred years after himself and enjoy his own prestige. But something has bothered me.

"I detect a flaw in your world," I say to the Revenant. "If Unus is truly only possibles, how can the always present Revenants exist, and this Chamber? This is a world of certainty—not possibility."

"We tread a fine line," says the Chief Revenant. "Sometimes Unus reaches 50.1 and stabilizes for the directives. Other times all of Unus, including the Revenants, fails to exist for eons. It is a loose way of sentience, but on the whole we are not scarred by too much of a past, and have all possible futures before us. This means occasional misery, but you can come up a genius in some directives—even sometimes reach Deputy Mayor."

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"I choose not to go home," I say latly. "Not even for Clarissa, although her hands send chills up ny spine. Not even for a book to by my heritage."

"You must go," says the Chief Revenant. "If you stay, you stabilize. If you stabilize we lose possibility and enjoy deadly probabilities. This ruins Unus. I just vant you to know why we are tossng the three of you off our plant. Nothing personal, you see."

We stand before the improbble space device, much larger han the allowable twenty pounds. There are we three Earthmen, he Chief Revenant, some of the Congress and one of the Temple asses.

"On behalf of the City of Orlo, Planet Unus, as Deputy Mayor, I ereby wish you farewell and godpeed," I tell Murchison and Slade. "Also me."

"On behalf of all Earthmen, I ccept your good wishes, including you," replies Murchison.

"You are talkative rascals," says he Chief Revenant, but in a kindy way.

The Temple girl approaches nd puts a necklace of flowers round our necks. She kisses each f us. It is a routine that I thought p as part of my duties as Deputy Mayor. My kiss reminds me of unny volcanoes, or of skimming n a nectarine ocean.

We climb into the ship. The Chief Revenant takes my hand. "I've seen worse Deputy Mayors," he says. "You got a lot of new stuff in."

"I used to be a Toastmaster," I reply, blinking back a tear.

The earth ship proceeded back towards Mars with its cargo-hold filled with samples, chemicals, foods, bottled atmospheres, and trinkets from all of our touchdown assignments.

Captain Wrislow ordered us into a ship assembly for a lecture about how well our job was done. Afterwards there was beer and we played poker. I found myself playing the card game in a long, gray room. And there was Clarissa, the ship hostess, arranging a bowl of green and white lilies.

"Now what was this last place, this Unus really like?" growled our Captain as we all relaxed.

Professor Murchison waved. "Too much oxygen in the air, heavy sodium chloride in the ground, water loaded with arsenic compounds. Nothing for Earthmen here."

I shuffled and dealt, calling for seven-card draw.

"You like it?" the Captain growled at George Slade.

"It stank," said Slade. He looked at the lovely Clarissa across the table as she daintily fingered her cards and smiled at him. I think he pinched her knee under the table.

"You, Daniels?" said the Captain.

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"You must imagine a street," I said. "On one side you have buildings and sunshine, sometimes clouds. The first building is a hospital with a maternity ward, next comes a school, children at play. Then a tavern where young people mix and mingle, amidst soft laughter and music. Beyond that a nice home with a man cutting grass. Then an office building where typewriters clack and IBM machines hum. Finally a funeral parlor, New England style with a pleasant looking hearse. All the Earth people cluster here.

"Across the street it is different. It is all one building, with open pavilions of grass, sometimes blue. There are many rooms, some light, some dark. Some emit sounds of laughter, some screams and some cries of wonder. There is no sequence to it. It contains all possibles, but sometimes it doesn't even exist. A few with imagination would walk on this side of the street serving a thousand thousand lifetimes, all things finally realized.

"You took booze down to Unus with you," grunted the Captain. "Give me three cards."

I gave him three. I gave myself two. My hand was bad. While the Captain chewed his cigar and cursed the Space Department for slowing up his Space Admiral promotion, I slipped my fingers into my jacket for the useful ace I kept there. The ace was there. Also a foreign-feeling paper that I didn't know about. I sneaked out the ace and put it in my card hand. George and Clarissa saw nothing but each other. The Captain was lost in a fog of cigar smoke. I don't know about Murchison.

I smoothed out the paper on my knee. It read:

VISA FOR UNUS
(Good for One Admittance)
(Sometimes)

Please admit Henry Daniels to *limited visits to Unus, yearly. Not* responsible for lost packages. Subject to Revenant's Tax for Temple upkeep.

The girl must've slipped it in my pocket when she gave me the final volcano kiss. I suddenly felt good. I would play my ace well.

Before I put the visa in my wallet for safekeeping and future use, I noticed the signature on the visa. I looked across the table at Professor Murchison. His eyes were heavy as if in a wink.

The visa was signed by the Mayor of Orlo, Planet Unus.

The name of my boss whom I never saw, the Mayor of Orlo, was Mur.

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CLIMACTERIC

by Avram Davidson

THEY HAD DRIVEN UP, JUST the two of them, to a place in the mountains he had spoken of—store, garage, hotel, all in one—it was a rare day, a vintage day, with no one to bother them while they ate lunch and shared a bottle of wine. She spoke most; the things she said were silly, really, but she was young and she was lovely and this lent a shimmer of beauty to her words.

His eyes fed upon her—the golden corona of her hair, the green topazes of her eyes, exquisitely fresh skin, creamy column of neck, her bosom (O twin orbs of sweet delight!)—

"But never mind that," she said, ceasing what she had been saying. "I want to forget all that. *You*: What were you like as a boy? What did you dream of?"

He smiled. "Of a million beautiful girls—all like you," he added, as she made a pretty pout with her red little mouth—"and how I would rescue them from a hideous dragon, piercing through its ugly scales with my lance," he said; "while its filthy claws scrabbled on the rocks in a death agony. . . . And the girl and I lived happily ever after, amid chaste kisses, nothing more."

She smiled, touched him. "Lovely," she said. "But—chaste kisses? Now, *I* used to dream—but never mind. It's funny how our dreams change, and yet, not so much, isn't it?" They looked swiftly about, saw nothing but a distant bird, speck-small in the sky; then they kissed.

Very soon afterwards they drove up a side road to the end, then climbed a path. "You're quite sure no one can see us here?" she asked.

"Quite sure," he said. He stepped back. There was a noise of great rushing, then a short scream, then—other noises. After a while he drew nearer and ran his hands lovingly over the sparkling and iridescent scales. The beautiful creature hissed appreciatively, and continued to clean its gorgeous and glittering claws with its shining black bifurcated tongue.

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The damnedest things happen when Mr. Edmondson goes out with his mad friend. There are times when the glancingly revealed alien intelligences seem more rational, more orderly, than local ones . . . though such is not always *the case.*

The Sign of the Goose

by G. C. Edmondson

I FELT GUILTY ABOUT LEAVING Shapiro in a bind but a man needs a rest so, after several false starts, we were finally leaving. "Hold it," I yelled, "Here's the mailman."

"So what?" a wife inquired from the back seat.

"Anyone," my mad friend mumbled, "who'd make a remark like that knows nothing of writers."

The flimsy brown paper envelope was unstamped but bore the franking of an official communication from the government of a neighboring country. My mad friend pulled away while I opened it. "Do we know a Señora Epifania López Viuda de Fuentes?" I asked.

Backseat discussion of whether the new botch look could be worn with open-toed sandals continued without interruption. I crumpled the letter and violated California's anti-litter law. Three blocks later a wife asked, "Who?"

"Epifania López, Vda. de Fuentes. I think it was."

"My aunt."

My mad friend braked and wordlessly retraced the three blocks. While he turned around again I rescued the crumpled letter from beneath a muzzled Volkswagen.

"She's going to be evicted if we don't stop by the *Recaudación de Rentas*."

"Really my great aunt. I only saw her once when I was a child."

"Back to the subject," my mad friend said. "In spite of Dogma and Eve, serpents are relatively unintelligent. As villains they're even less plausible than bugeyed monsters. What d'you think of Sauerbraten?" he continued with his usual change of subject.

"Then why? More logical that the fruit be offered by a politician. I'll bet the serpent's a Hebrew symbol of evil because some polytheistic neighbor worshipped his rat-trapping house snake. Sauerbraten's fair but the Wiener Schnitzel's better."

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It being neither a horse nor dog racing day, traffic was light. Twenty minutes later my friend clenched teeth at the transition to the highways of a country which I charitably refrain from naming. "I can't think of a more unlikely place for German cooking," he mumbled. "Incidentally, does *Recaudación de Rentas* have anything to do with rent?"

I shook my head. "It's where you pay taxes and water bills and buy sheets of sealed paper whenever you need a copy of your *ezcuintle*'s birth certificate."

"My *ezcuintles* were all born in Gringoland," my friend said.

"It is not possible that my great aunt Epifania be evicted," a wife said from the rear seat.

"Why?"

"She's dead."

"An excellent reason," my mad friend observed.

"This will bear investigation," I said prophetically. "Do you mind?"

"I faint from hunger," my friend answered, but he turned. We parked with some difficulty in a thoroughly dug up street.

Recaudación de Rentas was a long narrow room on the ground floor of the *Palacio*. We stood before the counter for several minutes. Eventually *Recaudación*'s single occupant finished filing her nails and swayed toward us like a vintage vamp. *"Dígame,"* she said apathetically.

"It treats of this matter which I do not clearly understand—" I smoothed the crumpled letter.

"Ah. First one goes to the Panteon Number Two."

"¿May one know where finds itself the Graveyard Number Two?"

"Any gendarme will advise."

"¿May one ask where everyone went?" my mad friend inquired.

"All gawk at an object which fell on the hill behind Cemetery Number Two."

"Egad!" my mad friend groaned.

I suppose I should have called Shapiro and told him where our lost weather balloon fetched up. But there was no phone handy so we got in the car.

"At least we can follow the crowd," my friend said.

"When do we eat?" a wife asked.

"Soon," I said hopefully.

Four bum steers later we parked at *Panteón* Number Two. A multitude clambered from mound to headstone to sarcophagus, descending the hill behind the cemetery.

"What of the UFO?" I asked a plump young man who pushed a three-wheeled-bicycle load of ice cream.

"Gone," he said in English. "They've even blotted out the tracks where it landed."

"Something really came down?" my mad friend asked.

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"About midnight, with a scream like a communist lawyer." A small girl with a large copper coin approached, so we left.

A toolshed stood in the center of the graveyard. In its doorway sat a thin, pockmarked man in pith helmet, leather puttees, and *guaraches*. "¿One may perhaps seek information?" I asked.

"¿How not?"

I handed him the crumpled letter.

"Epifania López, widow of Fuentes," he mused, and riffled through a ledger. "She'll be leaving tomorrow."

"This whole affair has taken on an aspect of unreality," my mad friend said in English.

The pockmarked man gave him an apologetic smile. "No spik."

"We were under the impression that the lady was dead," my friend added.

"She is." He glanced again at the ledger and memorized a number. Two of our wives got out of the car as we trailed him up the rocky slope. "Two-forty-two," he mumbled, consulting a small numbered stake. We walked down one row and backtracked another before he stopped. The mound was nearly hidden between a marble atrocity and a granite phallic symbol. Scrabbling through the weeds, the caretaker found a stake with faded typewriting under celluloid.

"Here's your aunt," I called to the wives who were catching up.

"And the lady is to be evicted?" my mad friend asked.

"Five years have elapsed and the plot has not been paid for."

"Where does she go from here?" I asked.

The caretaker mumbled vaguely and I deemed it best not to pursue the subject.

"¿How much are the fees?" my wife asked.

"Two hundred pesos."

Which, at 12½ to a dollar works out to, uh—

"Well, let's see," my friend said, "A peso's worth eight cents. Times two hundred—"

"Where's your slide rule?" a wife asked.

"Sixteen dollars," the caretaker said.

Both wives were looking at me.

"I could eat the blastoderm out of a nematode," my mad friend said.

Resignedly, I reached for my wallet.

"I am not permitted to accept money."

My mad friend slapped a hand to his forehead.

"One must go to *Recaudación*, taking the name, date, and plot number." He scribbled necessary data on the back of the crumpled letter. "It would be well to hurry," he added. "The graveyard locks itself at seventeen hours."

Walking at the maximum permitted men with wives, we returned to my friend's auto and

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bounced our way back. "The average snake," my friend continued, "has little intelligence. For reasons having nothing to do with theology, he's in an evolutionary blind alley and will never be smarter than a moderately precocious rutabaga."

"I knew you were a theologian but when did you become a herpetologist?"

"Satan's evil knowledge can often be turned against him."

There are times when I believe my mad friend could have jansenized St. Ignatius Loyola. We arrived again at *Recaudación*. There were now twelve girls in the office, filing nails, applying lipstick, knitting, reading the lonely hearts ads in *Confidencias*. One was typing an answer. The sole *secretario* finally deigned to notice us.

"We would like to pay the necessary fees for the tomb of Sra.—" I consulted the letter again.

"¿Another five years or in perpetuity?"

"That depends on how much it costs," I hedged.

"It's costing me malnutrition," my mad friend mumbled.

"One hundred and fifty pesos for five years. Two hundred *a la perpetuidad*."

"I wouldn't go through this again for four dollars."

He X-ed a square in a form and copied the name and plot number from the crumpled letter. He took my name, address, age, marital status, place of birth, nationality, native tongue, and occupation.

"What about political affiliation?" my mad friend asked.

"As a government employee I naturally belong to the Revolutionary Institutions Party," the *secretario* said loftily.

My friend sighed.

"And now the receipt, if you please."

"¿What receipt?"

The *secretario* controlled himself. "For the two hundred pesos," he said raggedly, "Didn't you stop at the cashier's office first?"

My friend and I looked at each other. "I'm dying," he moaned. "And I'm dieting."

"Over there," the *secretario* said tiredly. "And you'd better hurry."

We sprinted up an iron, fire-escape-like stairway to the *Palacio's* 2nd story. "*Recaudación* sends us for a receipt for two hundred pesos," I panted.

Counting audibly, a middle aged lady finished knitting a row then began a receipt in triplicate. I reached for my wallet and extracted two $10 bills.

"National currency," the lady said firmly.

"Quick!" my mad friend yelled. We dashed downstairs, across the patio looking for a place to buy some funny money. The *casa de cambio* across the street was closed. The next money changer was four blocks away. . . .

"I'm too exhausted to be hun-

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gry," my friend wheezed as we sprinted back with a fistful of tattered, inflation colored paper.

A small eternity later we were again rattling toward *Panteón Number Two.* The crowd had thinned by this time and I suddenly remembered that I hadn't as yet called Shapiro. "Funny how these stories grow," I said, remembering the ice cream vendor, "As if a weather balloon could make a noise coming down!"

"In nordic countries the saucer is invariably noiseless," my friend explained, "but Latins cannot tolerate the existence of silence. Nor, apparently, can my stomach."

Several wives descended from the car and followed us. We stood around the mound, each thinking his own thoughts. By now Aunt Epifania was definitely part of the family.

"A small marble stone would look nice," a wife said.

My fingers closed convulsively over my billfold. "Hasn't Aunt Fannie any issue of her own?"

"How much would a headstone cost?"

"A chemise and two pairs of alligator pumps with matching handbags ought to handle the down payment."

There was no answer.

"Verily, life is for the living," my mad friend muttered.

"I wonder where that caretaker is."

I was still wondering when an elderly lady attracted our attention by descending the graveyard's upper reaches with a recklessness hardly proper for her years and widow's weeds. Hopping from mound to mound, she skittered downhill knocking wreathes and headboards askew. *"¡Ay Diós, señor!"* she babbled, clutching at my lapels and snagging a stray wisp of beard. "There is fresh digging and a hand extends itself from the ground, making perfectly the sign of the cross!"

"Oi Gewalt!" my mad friend moaned. "A skeleton I'll be yet."

Sure enough, the plot adjoining the agitated widow's husband's had a hand sticking out. My friend and I viewed it circumspectly, avoiding each other's eyes from fear that suppressed smiles might erupt into something uncontrollable. Several wives were having a similar difficulty.

"Truly, *señora,* the hand makes the sign of the cross," my mad friend began. "But—" Abruptly, he buried his face in his handkerchief and coughed.

"What my friend wishes to say," I explained, "is that each country has its own language of gestures. Note, *señora,* that, though thumb and forefinger make the sign of the cross, little and ring fingers are also clenched."

My friend recovered from his coughing fit. "In our land, *señora,* the clenched fist with middle finger extended is a gesture without

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religious significance. It does, of course, have a secular meaning."

By this time the caretaker had appeared. "God forbid!" he wailed. "The notifications to proper authorities, the paper work—" He clutched his head in bony hands and the pith helmet rolled several meters downhill.

"*Calma,*" I said. "Some saucer gawker has a perverted sense of humor." I shook the gravel out of the latex-glove hand, rolled it, and stuffed it in my pocket.

We were nearly back to the car when he caught up with us. "I thank you," he said. "You cannot imagine the hours of bureaucrat anguish you have saved me."

"Like hell I can't!" my friend said grimly. "My royalties for an overripe mango."

"I shall remove the weeds from your great aunt's grave. I shall plant *jacintos* and *claveles* and water them daily."

"We shall be eternally grateful," I said, rushing through the ronde of Latin leavetaking. We made our escape.

After Suppe and Kartoffel Salat we settled down to a leisurely gorge of Bavarian potroast which, due to our lateness, was the only thing not crossed off the menu. Only a purist could have distinguished it from Sauerbraten. Halfway through my second hard roll I remembered. "Oh gad!"

A waiter appeared. "Yah?"

Not knowing whether this was German for "what do you want?" or Spanish for "are you already finished?" I asked for a telephone in English. "Got to call Shapiro," I explained.

When I returned my mad friend was arguing with his favorite wife about whether Spanish with a German or German with a Spanish accent sounds worse. A busboy removed some of our litter. A baldheaded Bavarian unveiled a trayful of assorted Schmaltzenmacherei and a bowl of whipped cream.

"Now where were we?" my mad friend asked. He sipped coffee with a longing look at my glass of Rhenish rotgut.

"The serpent," I reminded him. "Where does dogma assure us that reptiles cannot develop intelligence? If our fishy ancestors could, why not a snake?"

"I've often suspected piscine ancestry on your side," a wife interjected, "But I disclaim it for my own."

"Oho!" my mad friend laughed, "The grunnion bit, Mr. Bones."

Wives looked at us expectantly.

"Stripping the story and ourselves to bare essentials, we've all hand-caught them during the monthly high tides. As veterans of these fullmooned beach bacchanalia, we can swear before any and all tourists that the little fish is neither mysterious nor mythical."

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"All right," a wife said tiredly, "so we've all come home in the wee small hours with a case of sniffles and a bucket of grunnion. So what?"

"Mme. Grunnion's marvelous little instinct makes her lay eggs high enough on the beach so they won't get wet before hatching time twenty-eight days later. Can you, God's finest creature, with all your Vapours and Lunar Humours, disclaim a kinship with this tiny tidebound female?"

All wives became thoughtfully silent.

"And thou, mad friend of Celtic breed?"

"I grow less sorry by the minute for having taken the pledge. Returning to your argument, I see no point in dragging theology into a simple affair of two chambered hearts versus the four chambered pump of a viviparous species. Small things like these distinguish us from the fish and warm the connubial bed. By the way, what'd Shapiro have to say?"

"Oh, there's a mixup somewhere. The telemetering gear started working again and they've zeroed in on it somewhere in New Mexico."

My mad friend thoughtfully slopped another dollop of whipped cream into his coffee. "Then what do you suppose the local saucer gawkers were looking at?"

I pulled the obscenely gesturing glove from my pocket and unrolled it. "Odd," I said. "See the holes where the fingernails ought to be? More like a claw than a human hand. That new grave must have been directly below where the whatever-it-was landed."

"I suppose so," my friend mumbled.

"Say, feel of this."

My mad friend ran his fingers over the rough surfaced glove with its faint hint of scaliness. "Strange," he said. "Doesn't feel exactly like latex. More like a sloughed lizard skin."

"I suppose a skin-shedding would require more squiriming space than could be found in the average flying saucer," I said, "but why was he digging around that new grave?"

"Please," a wife said, "not while I'm eating."

My mad friend frowned. "If it's true I'll sue Him for breach of Covenant," he said distinctly.

And suddenly nobody was eating.

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Travelers in our circle make frequent casual mention of stopping off on Mars to refuel, or of dropping in on an old miner friend on Io—but they never tell you what it's really like on our solar suburbs. The Good Doctor offers the inside dope. . . .

CATSKILLS IN THE SKY

by Isaac Asimov

SOME MONTHS AGO, I RECEIVED, as a gift, a record entitled "Space Songs." It was intended for my children and so I called both of them to my record player and we all listened. They liked it, but, as it happened, I liked it even more than they did. Realizing, unlike Sir Philip Sydney, that my need was greater than theirs, I quietly added it to my own record collection and have listened to it periodically ever since.

(I am moved, at this point, to recommend it to you. It is put out by the Science Materials Center, a subsidiary of the Library of Science, 59 Fourth Avenue, New York 3, N. Y. This is an unsolicited and freely given plug, I assure you.)

Anyway, to get to the point, one of the songs on the record is entitled "Why Go Up There?" and the words are:

Why do we all want to be
up there—up there?
What is there to do or see
up there—up there?
Outer space
Is a place
Where we'll trace
the future.
There's a lot
Of who knows what
away—up there.

As you see, the reasons given to go up there are a bit vague, and I intend to correct that in this month's article. Let's consider

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some of the "who knows what" that will serve as strong inducements for the average man or woman to travel long distances away from the Earth.

Imagine a society in which spaceflight is routine, and no more difficult or remarkable than airflight is now, or trainflight was in the 19th Century, or coachflight in the 18th Century. Well, then, why should anyone want to go to the Moon?

For the same reason, it seems to me, that people nowadays want to go to Switzerland or Pakistan or Brazil; to see new sights, do new things and, in general, feel the stimulation of sensations never before experienced.

Presumably, there will be a time when the schoolteacher from Dubuque and the curious young man from Düsseldorf will carry their cameras along on some Cook's tour of the Moon, just to see the Moon and send back appropriate picture postcards (by rocket mail, of course) to their stodgy stay-at-home friends.

Naturally, there are many wild and grand things on the Moon that are not to be seen or experienced on the Earth; the vast silences, the bright, unwinking stars, the slowly moving inferno of the Sun, the trackless dust and the craggy peaks and ring-shaped crater walls, lit by the soft light of the Earth.

And, of course, of all the sights the most unique would be that of the Earth itself. I imagine that a picture of the Earth suspended in the sky would be on at least three-fourths of the picture postcards manufactured for the tourist trade, and if the Moon ever has a flag of its own, that flag will feature a white Earth on a black field.

The Earth as viewed from the Moon is far more impressive than the Moon as viewed from the Earth. The Earth's globe would be nearly four times the diameter of the Moon as seen by us now, and it would have thirteen times the area. Furthermore, the Earth reflects much more light than the Moon does (thanks to the Earth's atmosphere) and there is no air blanket on the Moon to sop up any of that reflected light. So the Earth ends up some 70 times as bright as the Moon appears to us.

What's more, the Earth would be much more interesting to look at. It would go through the same phases at the same rate that the Moon does, but the terminator (the line between light and dark) would not be the sharp, uninteresting boundary it is on the Moon. Again thanks to the Earth's atmosphere, it would be a gradual darkening, a visible fading of day into night.

The continents and oceans would not be clearly visible through the Earth's cloudy, light-scattering atmosphere, but the

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globe would have a blue-white appearance arranged in misty bands (because of Earth's atmospheric circulation) parallel to the Equator. There may be washes of deeper blue, of blue-green, of faint orange to mark ocean, fertile land and desert.

In particular, the sight of Earth would be wonderful on those occasions when the Sun travels behind it and is hidden. (To us on Earth, such periods are "lunar eclipses.")

On such occasions, the Sun would approach the Earth from the east and the Earth would be visible only as a thin crescent, convex toward the Sun and probably lost in its glare. The Solar corona, which might also be lost in the glare of the Sun itself, would move behind the Earth's globe first; then more and more of the corona would be hidden until the globe of the Sun is bitten into. It would take just about one hour for the Sun's globe to disappear completely behind the Earth after initial contact.

During that hour, all the tourists would undoubtedly be watching from beneath a transparent dome fitted with special filters to cut out ultraviolet and most of the visible light. With the complete disappearance of the Sun's globe, the filters would be removed and the spectacle would be visible in full clarity and glory.

The corona itself, pearly white, would come into full view, its streamers extending beyond the Earth all around its perimeter. Between the corona and the black inner circle of the Earth would be a thin ring of orange fire! This would mark the sunlight, refracted ruddily through the Earth's atmosphere.

Undoubtedly, the Moon tours would feature special excursions to catch the eclipses and I can imagine the disappointment that would follow if climatic conditions on Earth were such that those sections of the atmosphere which happened to be exposed about the rim of our planet at the time of the eclipse were filled with clouds so that the ring of orange light did not come into view. (This actually happens sometimes, for although the Moon is usually a coppery color during total eclipse thanks to the light received from the orange ring of refracted Sunlight, it does, on a few occasions, black out entirely.) I can safely predict that some enterprising company will set up special "eclipse insurance" that, for an appropriate premium, would guarantee the return of the travel fee in case the ring doesn't show.

And, of course, since the Earth can be seen only from the side of the Moon facing us, that side will be much more valuable to the concessionaires. Owning land on the other side of the Moon will be much like owning a mountain re-

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sort which is not on a lake. (Nevertheless I can see the advertising folders now, making the most of the Other Side: "Be lost in the wonders never before seen by man. The Other Side, mysterious, haunting, hidden for long ages from all mankind, is now YOURS!)

But the Moon has more to offer than the sight of its skies. It has its low gravity. There is no question but that this would mean fun for the tourist. Twenty foot high-jumps, thirty foot broad-jumps, every man an athlete, whee-e-e-e-e. (I would even love, at this point, to speculate on an air-filled cavern in which men could strap wings on their arms and manipulate their lightened bodies in flight, but Bob Heinlein has already done that in "The Menace From Earth," F&SF, Aug. 1957.)

Yet low gravity wouldn't be all honey and soda-water, either. Anyone who expected to stay on the Moon for any length of time would have to get used to new ways of manipulating objects. On the earth we correlate weight and mass through a lifetime of practice. From the muscular effort it takes to lift a heavy medicine ball, we know in advance just about the oof it will take to catch one in the pit of the stomach.

On the Moon, weight (which is the measure of gravitational pull) goes down, but mass (an inalienable property of matter) does not change. The two no longer match. It is easier to pick up the medicine ball and therefore it may be natural to think it would take less of an oof to interpose the pit of the stomach, but it will not. The oof depends on the mass, not the weight, and until you learn to allow for that, you will be in trouble every time.

Again, you jump upward on the Moon in slow motion since the Moon's gravitational pull will slow you (as you go up) and speed you (as you go down) at only one-sixth the acceleration that the Earth's gravitational pull would. If you jump with all your might, however, you will leave the Moon's surface and, eventually, strike it again, with the same velocity with which you would leave and strike the Earth's. You will land with the usual momentum. If, therefore, you are deluded by the slowness of the jump into thinking you are going to land like a feather on the tippy-tippy-tip of your toe, and try to do so, you will very likely break your ankle.

Then, nothing is so easy to get used to as luxury and once your muscles get the hang of low gravity, they will get to like it and learn to expend no more effort than necessary. They will probably weaken rapidly and turn to flab. No harm to this on the Moon, but what about the day you land

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on Earth and find your muscles are protesting violently at the sudden six-fold increase in weight?

In fact, I'll get out on a limb and predict that when the Moon is colonized, people who expect to travel back to Earth now and then will have to undergo an established period of exercise under Earth-normal gravity to keep their muscles toned up. One practical way in which this might be done would be to maintain a large centrifuge which can be whirled just fast enough to induce a centrifugal force equal to Earth's gravity.

I can see tourists being herded into the centrifuge in shifts each day with a grim no-nonsense drill-master in charge insisting on a full regimen of calisthenics. Of course, there would be the inevitable wise guy who succeeds in goofing off, and the price he pays in semi-collapse when he gets back to the Earth will be well-deserved.

Then there is the possibility that some human beings will deliberately want the low gravity as a permanent thing. When retirement age comes, old hearts that must struggle to pump a weight of blood against gravity and old muscles that must struggle to lift the weight of the body will obviously be benefited by having some of that weight removed. The old (provided they can afford the price of a ticket and are strong enough to withstand the accelerational rigors of the journey) might well find decades added to their life on the Moon.

The decision to spend one's final decades on the Moon might well be irreversible, however. I don't see the aged being able to resume the remaining five-sixths of their weight, once they have been relieved of it for any period of time. And yet some may, too late, regret their decision. Too late, they will long for home.

I suppose one could write a story about one of them, watching the globe of the Earth with his heart in his eyes, hanging about the fringe of tourist parties with hopeless yearning and, eventually, managing to stow away on a ship bound back for Earth. The acceleration would nearly kill him, of course, and he would be dying when discovered. But he would have one last look at Earth's green hills, one last breath of free air, even one last heavy drag of Earth's gravity before dying.

(I rather suspect The Kindly Editor disapproves of my tossing ideas away like this and would rather they were written up as stories, in actual fact.[1])

[1] *In 1936, Ernest Hemingway wrote for Esquire a piece called "On the Blue Water," which contained a one-paragraph anecdote about another old man. Some 20 years later he got around to expanding it—into a book called* THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA. *If we could wait for Hemingway, surely we can wait for The Good Doctor.*

—THE KINDLY EDITOR

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We can look a bit further into the future, when flights to the Moon become so tame as to become déclassé— "My dear, no one, but no one, goes to the Moon any more. It's just *filled* with the most *awful* people. You might as well go to the Catskills."

But what can we get elsewhere that we cannot get on either the Earth or the Moon? What can we get to attract the tourist trade? Of the two nearest planetary targets, Venus is perpetually cloud-covered and there is no way of knowing what its surface would be like. We can, however, predict that its sky will be a uniform and perpetual gray, and right away, I denounce that as unbearably depressing.

Mars, on the other hand, has two moons in a clear sky—wow! Any number of heady descriptions have been written of the romantic stimulation involved for a young couple looking at two moons instead of one.

Unfortunately, this is sheer moonshine. One of Mars's two moons is no moon at all in our sense of the word. I refer to Deimos, the outer of the two, which is nothing but a mountain on the loose. It is five miles in diameter and since it is 12,500 Miles from Mar's surface, it shows no visible disk. It is a mere point of light just about as bright, when seen from Mars' surface, as Venus seems to us on Earth's surface.

Phobos is not much larger, being only about ten miles in diameter. However, it circles only 3,600 miles above the surface of Mars, so when it is directly overhead it is, despite its small size, about a third of the diameter of the Moon as seen from the Earth. When it is close to the horizon, it is further away by the radius of Mars itself so that its apparent diameter is cut almost in half.

At zenith it would be only 1/20th as bright as the Moon, and only 1/60th as bright when it is near the horizon. Because of its small size, Phobos might well be irregular in shape and it might be amusing to watch a craggy moon, instead of a smooth one.

There is another point about Phobos that would interest the tourist. Small and dim it may be, but Great Galaxy, it *moves*. It revolves about Mars in 7 hours and 40 minutes. This is faster than Mars rotates about its own axis (24½ hours). Phobos therefore overtakes the Martian surface and rises in the west and sets in the east.

To an observer on Mars, Phobos would streak from western horizon to eastern in about 5½ hours. It would move quickly enough for its motion to be visible to the naked eye. And, to top it off, it would change phases as it travelled, going through more than half the cycle during the period in which it was above the horizon.

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Certainly, this would at least ırtially compensate for its small- ːss and dimness compared with ır Moon, and the Martian vaca- ɔn folders would undoubtedly go ːavily to town on the subject of ıobos' motion, with pictures that ɔuld probably shamelessly exag- ːrate its size. Of course, the real tate owners on Mars would have be careful. Phobos is so near ars's surface that the bulge of ars's globe cuts off the view of e moon from any observer near e Martian poles—a tourist ıven on the planet must not be cated too far north or south if a ew of Phobos is desired.

(The one interesting object in e skies of Mars apart from the ʋo moons would be Earth itself. would be the "evening star" of ars, visible under the conditions at we see Venus. Earth to the urist on Mars, however, would ɔt be as bright as Venus is to us; would be no brighter, at best, an Sirius. Yet Earth would have is advantage over Venus; Earth ıs an attendant Moon. As seen ɔm Mars, our Moon would have maximum magnitude of 3.0. It ɔuld resemble an average star in ightness and would be clearly ːible, with a maximum separa- ɔn from the Earth of half a de- ee—the apparent width of the ın as we see it. From evening to ening, or from dawn to dawn, e changing relationship of Earth ıd Moon would form a dramatic picture. And, of course, the tour- ist would be watching "home.")

However, why view a moon and other objects from a planet, when you can view those other ob- jects, plus a planet, from a moon. The view of Earth from the Moon is much more impressive than vice versa and the same can be said, in spades, of the view of Mars from Phobos.

In fact, the view of Mars from Phobos is simply tremendous. Mars has a diameter of 4,200 miles, only slightly over half that of the Earth, but from Phobos it is seen at a distance of only 3,600 miles, surface to surface. Mars is a bloated object in Phobos' sky, 42 degrees of arc from edge to edge; or, to put it another way, if one edge of Mars touched the horizon, the other would be half way to zenith.

Phobos, in all probability, keeps one side facing Mars at all times, so the red planet would keep its bloated bulk in position, gleaming with a light equal to over 7,000 times that of our full Moon. *There's* something for poets to write about, and something big enough for lovers' heads to be out- lined against.

The gravity of Mars is only 2/5 that of the Earth and on Phobos it is virtually nil, so centrifuges must be kept in play, but I won't go into that again.

Is there any sight in the Solar system more overpowering than

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that of Mars as seen from Phobos? Well, to begin with, there is the sight of Jupiter as seen from its nearest satellite.

Jupiter's massive gravitational field will make it a ticklish planet to approach, but no doubt it can be done by working our way slowly down the line of its moons. We can land on one of the outermost satellites (which are only captured planetoids, fifteen miles or so in diameter) and build up a base from which a ship can be sent to Callisto.

Callisto is the outermost of the giant Jovian satellites, 1,170,000 miles from Jupiter; but from it, Jupiter already appears larger and brighter than the full Moon appears to us. Inside Callisto's orbit is first Ganymede, then Europa, then Io. From Io, the innermost of the giant Jovian satellites, Jupiter has waxed in size until it is nearly 400 times as bright as the full Moon and 40 times as wide.

But there is one satellite, a small one (perhaps 150 miles in diameter), that is even closer to Jupiter than Io is. This innermost satellite, variously called Jupiter V, Barnard's satellite, and Amalthea, is only 66,000 miles from Jupiter's surface, and to be that close to Jupiter is something indeed.

In Amalthea's sky, the planet Jupiter would be 46 degrees wide and its area would be rather larger than Mars as seen from Phobos. To be sure, Jupiter is further from the Sun than Mars is and would be less strongly illuminated, so that its globe as seen from Amalthea would be only 3/10ths as bright as Mars' seen from Phobos. However, Jupiter is far the grander spectacle. Mars is a quiet, ruddy world, with a bare unchanging surface in view—the view of Jupiter would be of a richly turbulent atmosphere, orange, blue, green and white in belts of frozen free radicals, mottled with storms and crawling with colossal tornadoes. (The brochures would be lyrical indeed for any of the Jovian satellites.)

In addition, Jupiter's four giant satellites would be in Amalthea's skies. Io, closest to Amalthea, would appear somewhat larger than our Moon, the remaining three would appear progressively smaller. Each would move through the sky at a different speed, passing behind Jupiter once each revolution and forming a changing pattern that would be a whispered background to Jupiter's colossal shout.

If we compare the Catskills in the sky so far mentioned, I should guess that the Moon and Mars would be relatively cheap vacation lands—for the masses, so to speak. Phobos, because of its small size, would be expensive and perhaps restricted to people with political pull. The moons of Jupiter would range from fairly cheap to

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uite expensive, depending on ow close to Jupiter they were and how much power it took to et there and leave). But certain-, it would be Amalthea that ould be the true playground of ie millionaires.

I can picture a new Las Vegas nder a transparent dome on malthea. Over it, a seething upiter hangs ominously. A small ea-sized Sun would cross the sky nd pass behind Jupiter every six ours and the moons would come nd go in counterpoint. What ould be more beautiful?

Well, one thing, of course. Saturn and its rings.

We can eliminate the planets eyond Saturn. The distances are remendous, the worlds are dim nd uninteresting compared with upiter. But Saturn has its rings.

To be sure those are a uniquely eautiful sight, but alas, most of aturn's satellites don't cooperate. Your first thought might be to travel to the satellite nearest Saturn and get a good look at the rings. That satellite would be Mimas, only about 80,000 miles from Saturn's surface and only 35,000 miles from the outermost edge of the rings.

Unfortunately, Mimas revolves in the plane of Saturn's equator and so do the rings. This means that from Mimas, the rings are seen edge-on at all times. Since the rings are very thin (ten miles thick at the most), seeing them edge-on from any reasonable distance means not seeing them at all. The next seven satellites beyond Mimas also revolve in the plane of Saturn's equator and all are likewise useless as far as a good view of the rings is concerned.

That leaves the ninth and outermost satellite, Phoebe. This is really a captured planetoid (200

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miles in diameter, perhaps) and does not rotate in the plane of Saturn's equator. It's orbit, in fact, is inclined 30 degrees to the equator, so that the rings at times may be seen at a more extreme angle than they can possibly be seen from Earth.

It is too bad that Phoebe is 8,000,000 miles from Saturn. From that distance, Saturn seems no larger than the Moon seems to us. The rings would stretch over an extreme width of only a little more than twice the width of the Moon. And yet let's not complain. Even at that distance, Phoebe would offer what most people would be content to admit was the most steadily beautiful naked-eye sight in the Solar system. (And no doubt the tours will be priced accordingly.)

Phoebe revolves about Saturn in 18 months, which means that every nine months the rings are seen edge-on, while half way between those two edge-on appearances there would be a maximum view. The wise tourist would time his visits for the maximum view if he could afford it. Those who had to count the dollars would have to take advantage of the lower rates during the times when the rings approach the edge-on view. And, no doubt, the two weeks before and after the edge-on view will be the "slow season" on Phoebe.

That leaves one tourist view which is probably the most frightening and ferocious of all, too frightening and ferocious ever to be really popular, I dare say. I am referring, of course, to a close look at the Sun.

There are two important bodies in the Solar system from which the Sun would seem larger and brighter than from the Earth. These are Venus and Mercury. Venus can be left out of account.

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ts clouds effectively block off a iew of the Sun and, even if the un could be seen, it would be nly about 1.8 times the size and rightness it appears from Earth.

Mercury does much better. At ts aphelion, Mercury's Sun is nore than four times as large and right as ours is, and at perihelion t is slightly more than ten times is large and bright. However, Mer-ury would not be an easy place to each, and I have a feeling that ourist accommodations would al-ways be poor.

What I have in mind, though, s an even more extreme case.

There is a planetoid named Icarus, discovered in 1948, which nas a rather comet-like orbit. At he far end of the flattened ellipse n which it travels, Icarus retreats rom the Sun to an aphelion dis-ance of 184,000,000 miles (which is thirty million miles fur-her out from the Sun than Mars ever gets).

As it moves toward perihelion, nowever, Icarus flashes past the rbit of Earth, of Venus, and even of Mercury, and approaches to within nearly 17,000,000 miles of the Sun, whizzing about it in a fast spin and then heading out-ward again.

When Icarus is at perihelion, the Sun is almost 30 times as large and as bright as it seems to us on Earth. The surface of Icarus must glow in red heat when it skims the Sun.

For most of its orbital travels, however, Icarus would be far enough from the Sun for ships to land on it without trouble. Sup-pose the safe interval was used to blast a cavern inside the mile-wide planetoid. A few thousand feet of rock would stave off the heat of the Sun during the close approach (rock is an excellent insulator), and appropriately filtered and pro-tected television receivers could present a view of the Sun that would be unimaginably magnifi-cent.

Undoubtedly, the Icarus Solar Station would be available only as a scientific laboratory and would *not* be open to tourists. However, occasionally, a Congressman or some other VIP will wangle a trip.

And if so, what a story he'll have to tell.

As for myself, after thinking it over carefully, I *think* I'll stay home. I've been so many places now, without budging from my chair, that my typewriter is be-ginning to blur and look like a spaceship. Even that much wor-ries my gentle, unadventurous spirit.

But I'll be glad to stand at the spaceport and wave good-bye if any of the rest of you want to go.

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BOOKS

THE TEDIOUS MR. LOVECRAFT

by Damon Knight

MY REMARKS ABOUT H. P. LOVECRAFT three months ago brought several long letters of rebuttal from his partisans. Mrs. R. J. Snyder of Canoga Park, Calif., Allan Howard of Newark, N. J., and James Wade of Chicago all pointed out that I had erred in calling Lovecraft's monsters inexplicit. Fritz Leiber made the same comment, adding, "It seems to me that Arthur Machen made more use than Lovecraft of the idea of 'unspeakable' horrors—and with Machen one gets the idea that these horrors were unspeakable because they involved abnormal sex, being generally associated with some pagan or witch cult. [. . .] Of course Lovecraft did use the 'unnameable' device in a few stories like 'The Statement of Randolph Carter'—and 'The Unnameable'!—but I think the tediousness (for some readers) of his later stories comes from something else—chiefly his liking for writing stories as if they came from the pen of a rather fussy long-winded New England scholar . . . sort of Gibbonesque prose . . . something very apt to happen to the first-person narrative when done by a thoughtful writer who has a hero rather like himself."

THE SHUTTERED ROOM AND OTHER PIECES, by H. P. Lovecraft & Divers Hands (Arkham, $5.00), now gives me an opportunity to enlarge on this topic. Here are some phrases and sentences culled from "Dagon," a story which Lovecraft's followers consider one of his best:

"When you have read these hastily scrawled pages you may guess, though never fully realize, why it is that I must have forgetfulness or death" (p. 291); "the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things" (p. 292); "Urged on by an impulse which I cannot definitely define" (p. 294); "A closer scrutiny filled me with

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sensations I cannot express" (ibid.); "Of their faces and forms I dare not speak in detail; for the mere remembrance makes me grow faint" (p. 295).

In spite of these examples, which could be multiplied many times over from Lovecraft's other stories, it *is* true that as a rule, he did make a practice of bringing his monster or alien on stage once, near the end of each story, for one brief, static glimpse. In this respect, "The Shuttered Room," completed by Derleth from HPL's notes, is typical. The story broadly hints, over and over (until the protagonist's continued obtuseness drives the reader to chew paper), that a frog-like monster, capable of enormously increasing its size, is living in a boarded-up room in an old mill. At the end of the story, we meet it:

"There, squatting in the midst of the tumbled bedding from that long-abandoned bed, sat a monstrous, leathery-skinned creature that was neither frog nor man, one gorged with food, with blood still slavering from its batrachian jaws and upon its webbed fingers—a monstrous entity that had strong, powerfully long arms, grown from its bestial body like those of a frog, and tapering off into a man's hands, save for the webbing between the fingers . . ."

At this point, the monster springs, and the protagonist pots it with a kerosene lamp. End of monster.

Now, this is my real objection to Lovecraft and his imitators (aside from their arthritic styles): the monster does appear, sometimes, but only as a sort of peep-show. It is never brought onstage, as Leiber's and Sturgeon's monsters are, to act and react against the other characters. Thus the story remains in embryo, is never developed; one of the primary requirements of fiction is not fulfilled. A story has a beginning, a middle and an end: Lovecraft's pieces are only endlessly retraced beginnings.

THE SHUTTERED ROOM, nevertheless, will appeal to those who, like Anthony Boucher, find Lovecraft's life more interesting than his works. Besides the stories already mentioned, the volume contains two other well-known Lovecraft stories ("The Outsider" and "The Strange High House in the Mist"), one more posthumous collaboration with the busy Mr. Derleth ("The Fisherman of Falcon Point"), seven "Juvenilia and Early Tales," all pretty awful, and a miscellaneous collection of Lovecraftiana: essays, notes for stories, tabulations of his themes and the recurring figures of his invented mythos, and a series of personal recollections, from which a grotesque and curiously appealing picture emerges. Lovecraft was a neurasthenic recluse, scholarly, fastidious and prim; yet out of this

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grey figure, through his voluminous letters, flowed an astonishing warmth and generosity toward younger writers. That he was much loved is undoubted; that he was not exactly like anyone else is well shown by such episodes as that of the ice-cream-eating contest (in which Lovecraft and James F. Morton each consumed twenty-six pints at a sitting, while Donald Wandrei, who tells the story, pooped out after seven); or that of W. Paul Cook's cat. Cook, who was being visited by Lovecraft, wanted him to write an article for his amateur magazine. "Knowing his nocturnal habits, I settled him at my desk to make a start on it, when the lateness of the hour forced me off to bed to be ready to pull out and go to work next day. Just before I left him, I dropped a half-grown kitten into his lap. [. . .]

"Next morning I found Howard sitting exactly as I had left him—not one scratch on his paper, the kitten still asleep in his arms. And when I remonstrated because he hadn't got on with my article, he replied, 'But I didn't want to disturb kitty!' "

Briefly Noted

In a collection of essays called THE WORLD'S LAST NIGHT (Harcourt, Brace, $3.00), the nimble C. S. Lewis again dangles himself like a yo-yo over the pit of free inquiry, turns cartwheels and loops the loop, yet the string never breaks and he never falls in. Like his previous works of Christian apology, this one is full of half-truths, misstatements, evasions, sleight-of-hand and downright falsehood. (E. g., "Christians and their opponents again and again expect that some new discovery will either turn matters of faith into matters of knowledge or else reduce them to patent absurdities. But it has never happened.") His speculations about life on other planets (in "Religion and Rocketry") are too well-tethered to be valuable. The book is nevertheless of interest for much good sense, brilliantly expressed, about life and letters, and in particular for a new Screwtape essay, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast."

Ballantine has published the first American edition of THE SOUND OF HIS HORN, by "Sarban" (35¢), with an introduction by Kingsley Amis, who praised the book in his NEW MAPS OF HELL. This nightmare of a world conquered by the Nazis is a minor thing, crude in places, but persuasive.

Recent reprints of unusual interest include THREE ADVENTURE NOVELS by H. Rider Haggard—complete texts of KING SOLOMON'S MINES, SHE, and ALLAN QUATERMAIN (Dover, $2.00); THE CROCK OF GOLD by James Stephens (Macmillan, $1.35); Marjorie

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Hope Nicolson's scholarly VOYAGES TO THE MOON (Macmillan, $1.75); THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY, by G. K. Chesterton (Putnam, $1.15); and the one-volume abridgment of Sir James Frazer's THE GOLDEN BOUGH (Macmillan, $2.50).

Walter W. Lee, Jr., of 2519 Armacost Ave., Los Angeles 64, Calif., writes that a few copies of his comprehensive SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FILM CHECKLIST are still available at $2.00.

WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN, by Day Keene and Leonard Pruyn (Gold Medal, 35¢) has my vote for the most offensively vulgar, prurient, sadistic, ignorant, degrading and meretricious s.f. book of the season. I suggest a suitable award, say an inscribed ashtray in the form of a tinklepot.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXIX

In 2263, Ferdinand Feghoot and his beautiful wife landed on Blaupunkt, a backwoods planet where thousands of construction hands, crewmen, and scientists had been marooned for six years. They at once fell madly in love with her. Luckily, one of their scientists had perfected a matter duplicator which could duplicate living beings as easily as ten-credit bills. The duplicates were shy on intelligence, but the Feghoots' hosts didn't care in the least. Very politely, they asked Mrs. Feghoot to act as their model, and amiably she agreed.

Because the duplicator could turn out only a few dozen women a day, polyandry was resorted to. Each new woman was married to a gang of ten men. The gangs prized their wives highly, and treated them well; and the good-natured duplicates enjoyed the arrangement tremendously.

Soon, however, Mrs. Feghoot began to lose weight and feel tired and irritable. "Every time they marry one of those girls, it takes something out of me," she complained. "Ferdinand, take me away!"

Feghoot watched for his chance. Slamming the air-lock of his spaceship when all the men were outside, he prepared to take off.

The men pleaded and wept. "*Please* don't go yet," they begged.

"I'm sorry," Ferdinand Feghoot said sadly, "but those wedding gangs are breaking up that old belle of mine."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON
(with thanks to David Burwasser)

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Callahan said he was a research cybernetician; Amantha, who had gypsy blood, said he was a mad inventor, and he had no business giving his wheelies the run of the whole shebeen. *Furthermore, she said, they were getting wily. "Ridiculous," said Callahan fondly—until he woke one morning to find himself locked in his own bedroom. . . .*

CALLAHAN AND THE WHEELIES

by Stephen Barr

"IF I'D ONLY *known*," AMANTHA said, "if someone had only *cautioned* me—if my mother'd just had the sense to *warn* me to . . . to . . ."

"What's all this leading up to?" Callahan asked uneasily.

"Why, then I'd have known better than to marry a mad inventor, is what!" Amantha said, picking up the wastebasket and retrieving its scattered contents. "Look at this room! Look at the whole house, for that matter! Why can't they be kept in the lab where they belong, I should like to know? Tell me that?" She blinked her black eyes angrily.

"I'm not an inventor," Callahan said, going over to where the little three-wheeled mechanism was now attempting to pull a book out of the bottom shelf. He turned it around to face the room. "I'm a research cybernetician. Inventors—"

"Well, whatever you are, you're mad as a hatter." Amantha glared at the little object on wheels—it was about the size of a rollerskate and it seemed to be considering what to do next. It turned its photo-electric scanners this way and that, waving its jointed grappling-arms about. Then it appeared to make up its mind, and trundled over to a wall socket in the baseboard, plugged itself in and proceeded to recharge itself. Amantha turned in exasperation as another one came rolling in at the door with a faint clicking sound. It went to the first and waited patiently until it was through recharging and had disengaged itself from the outlet; then it took its place. The recharged one made for the door and, turning to the right, disappeared along the corridor.

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"No you don't!" Amantha said, and ran after it. "Not in my study you don't go!"

Callahan followed and found his wife standing with her back to the door of her study, defensively facing the little machine, which looked frustrated. "It's bad enough," she said, "when they get into the closet and hide my shoes, God knows, but I'll not have any wheely going into my study, and that's flat!" The wheely—although it had no auditory equipment—seemed to understand, and turning neatly around, it went clicking down the corridor in the direction of the lab.

In the Callahans' big one-story house on the edge of a village in upstate New York there was one room kept inviolate, and that was Amantha's study, where she did her writing—mostly stories about children. These stories were totally lacking in sentimentality, and had, in fact, a faintly sardonic tinge, which may have accounted for their popularity among the young.

When the wheely had disappeared into the lab she looked Callahan in the eye. This could be alarming, because Amantha had an Irish father and a mother who was a French Gypsy. Callahan felt he could handle the Irish part but he wasn't so sure about the other.

"Callahan," she said, "the time has come to have this out. When you started in on this . . . this project of yours, the understanding was the writing would be done in my study and the inventing would be going on in the lab—you'd stay in your shop and I'd stay in my shop. And now what happens? The wheelies have got the run of the whole shebeen! Do you remember what that one did to my stockings? The little one that had the four wheels?"

"It's not around any more," Callahan said. "It shorted itself and blew its circuits. You can keep the bedroom door closed, can't you?"

"They get in the kitchen," she said, "and open the oven door. You can't go opening the oven door on a souffle! There's no lock on the oven and I don't want to shut up the kitchen—how would I keep an eye on the roast save I could smell it when I'm in the study?"

"What's wrong with using the timer on the stove?"

"Clocks are no good for food: they've not got the feel for it. You've just got to keep those chaps of yours in the lab, *miri rom,* or else teach them to mind. Let 'em run in the garden—it's a nice fine day."

"The last time they were in the garden," Callahan said, "one of them went out onto the highway and got flattened by a truck. And anyway they're not supposed to *mind:* they're supposed to have complete freedom of choice. I want their graphite-gel circuits to experience anything that—"

"Well, I hope you gave the poor

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little flattened-out thing a decent burial," Amantha said.

"I did not," Callahan said. "They're not *animals*, Amantha, dammit! They're machines—with flexible memory-circuits and feedback controls, and they're very impressionable."

"Hmph!" Amantha said. "I'd call it nosy!"

"They are not! That's not curiosity—they're motivated first by a random device and then they learn. The lines of connection in the graphite-gel that turn out the most successful remain like a printed circuit, and then if occasion arises, they *over*print them. My whole idea is to get away from a machine with a set of prearranged instructions, and let them teach themselves by trial and error. You might call it the survival element."

"Darwin's theory of devil take the hindmost, is what you mean," said Amantha. There was a sound of banging from the kitchen and she gave him a severe look and they went to investigate. A wheely was next to the treadle-operated garbage pail, raising the lid and letting it fall in an aimless way. Its scanners followed the movement, and an arm kept time with it.

"Now what!" Amantha said, and bent down to stop the clatter.

"No, leave it alone: it's getting a correlation between the movement of the treadle and the cover. It'll stop when it finds it doesn't help it move forward or get anywhere."

"Is *that* all the poor mite wants to do?"

"Well, that, and keep recharged—I had to start them with something. And I put in a couple of don'ts, like the heat detector, so they won't go and set us on fire. That's why they don't stick around when they open the oven door. They're quite simple, essentially, Amantha." The essentially simple wheely gave up the banging and butted the garbage pail, but it was too heavy to be moved that way. After another try it stopped and went into a corner where it came to a standstill.

"I think you're dotty," Amantha said. "I wish you'd stayed with computers. Computers aren't forever running around under foot."

"That's the whole point," Callahan said, sitting on the edge of the kitchen table with a lecturer's air. "A computer just sits back on its big can and never experiences anything that results from its own activities! It gets a mass of information fed into it, but that's not the same thing. Those big computers don't move around and *do* anything—if they did, and if they had some sort of goal like the wheelies recharging themselves, they'd be thinking instead of just calculating. True thought starts with operational response to environment!"

"That's a fine, fancy, twopence-colored phrase!" Amantha said.

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"You ought to take up writing, Callahan, and that's a fact."

"Well, I've got to get to work," he said, and got up.

"Dust yourself off, then," Amantha said. "You've got flour all over *your* big . . . yourself."

When he got to the lab, Callahan found two wheelies engaged in a shoving match. He watched with interest—this was a new phase. After a while one of them gave it up and turned aside, letting the other have the right of way. Callahan decided it had been a matter of chance—he did not feel that rivalry had been involved, it was whether an enduring or viable engram had been produced in their nearly amorphous "brains." Of course in the actual living animal brain, the whole system of neurons, synapses and connecting fibres was there to start with, and repeated activity would eventually produce useful patterns, but with the wheelies' undifferentiated mass of semi-conducting graphite-gel it was more like the lining-up of polarized particles in a magnetic field. "What I want to try," he had said to Amantha, "is giving a small computer a *purpose*—and arms and legs. Well, wheels, anyway."

"I think you're dotty," she said.

He went back to work—attempting to take an electroencephalogram of a wheely. This had become increasingly difficult as they reacted more and more fractiously to being held still, and it was hard not to think of this as resentment. If one of them happened to be for the moment inactive, the electroencephalograph showed nothing but the basic Alpha-pulsation—its particular resonance—whereas when confined it would go into what Amantha called the dithers. The day wore on rather frustratingly. At five o'clock he went to the fuse box and opened a switch that supplied all the baseplugs available to the wheelies. The others—the ones in use for floor lamps—could not be got at without a special tool, and were on a separate circuit. This arrangement had become necessary when the wheelies had achieved their present adventuresomeness; without it, there would be no sleep for anybody. With their current off the wheelies would run out of power and come to rest until he recharged them in the morning.

At dinner he said, "You know, Amantha, they may get to associate me with stopping their power supply. Since they're not in perceptual working order when I recharge them, I don't get credit for it. They're getting a onesided view—I hope they don't develop aggressive patterns."

"Well, watch out they don't *drab* you," she said. Callahan thought this over, and decided it meant poisoned—he wasn't much good at understanding the Romany *jib*, though.

"Underwood called up this aft-

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ernoon," he said. "You were in the study. That man's a dolt . . ."

"He's that," Amantha said. "What did he have to say for himself?"

"Oh, he wanted to remind me of the symposium tomorrow night. Since I'm the principal speaker I'm not likely to forget it. I'm reading a paper on my experiments. Then he maundered on about dendrite fibres—he's one of those over-informed skeptics. He doesn't seem to realise that graphite—"

"Come on," Amantha broke in. "We'll miss the TV."

"What's on? Not a western, I hope: I'm sick of cowboys and Indians."

"No, it's an eastern: policemen and miscreants."

He followed her down the corridor, but he was concerned with his thoughts about the coming symposium, and failed to notice a small shape that dodged around a far corner. Since all wheelies by this time had presumably run out of power, it was as well for his peace of mind that he did not see it.

When Callahan woke the next morning he saw that his wife was already dressed. She seemed to be having trouble with the bedroom door. "That's a funny thing," she said, with a frown. "The door's locked . . . and on the outside . . ."

He got up and went to her and tried the handle, but the door wouldn't open. "For God's sake!" he said.

"I warned you. They're locking us in, now."

"But they can't *reach* the lock!" He started for the window. "Besides I turned off the base plugs . . ." He climbed out and entered the house by the front door. He let Amantha out, and there was a silence. Then a wheely went clicking by into the living room.

"Well, you did forget the switch, Callahan."

"I did not, dammit! Come; I'll show you." They went to the lab and he opened the fuse box. "There: I told you it was off, and they couldn't have reached the bedroom key anyway."

"Yes?" she said. "Well, look at that."

He turned and saw a pile of books that had been arranged in a crude staircase from the floor to the work bench. "Well, I'll be . . ." He stood staring.

"But, Callahan, dear, how could they manage the steps with their wheels?"

"Sponge-rubber tires," he said absently. "But their power should have run out last night . . . Oh, *ho!*" He pointed to the wall at the back of the bench where there was a wall socket at working level—not on the circuit with the disconnected base plugs. Next to it a test-tube rack had been knocked over. "This is the damnedest thing

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I've ever seen! But the bedroom lock . . . There weren't any books piled up there!"

"Maybe they put 'em back," said Amantha. They went to the living room and found the books scattered on the floor. They watched as a wheely fiddled with them, finally putting one on top of the other. Then it sighted Callahan's foot, and it turned and strolled out into the hall at top speed.

"It's afraid of you, Callahan," she said. "And no wonder, with all the shouting."

"I wasn't shouting! And besides, it has no hearing!"

Amantha tossed her dark head. "*I* think you hurt its feelings."

"For Pete's sakes, the whole thing's just luck! Trial and error!"

"*I* think it was clever."

He went and got dressed, and then around the house collecting the inert wheelies—only the one had contrived to recharge itself—and he plugged them into the bench outlet for a few minutes each. Then he turned them loose for the day and reconnected the base-plugs. He realized he had forgotten to notice the identity of the one that had been so ingenious—or, rather, lucky—they all had number plates screwed into their tops. He went to ask Amantha if she had noticed.

"Thirteen, of course," she said. "Who else? He's the wily one."

"Ridiculous!" he said, and returned to the lab. He took the books back to the living room and worked for the next couple of hours rewiring all the outlets he had previously assumed to be out of wheely-reach, so that they could be turned off with the base-plugs. Then he considered putting a lock on the fuse box, but the wheelies would scarcely recognize the significance of a line switch . . . he hoped. He went into the hall and saw his neighbor's eleven-year-old son, Peter Brown, coming in at the front door. He had a gleam in his eye, and Callahan led him away from the lab into the living-room. Peter's widowed mother, Jessica Brown, had been in a few days back and she had seen a wheely. Report of this had probably got to Peter.

"Say, Mr. Callahan! Mother says you've got a model locomotive that runs around without any—" He broke off as two wheelies rolled in and raced for the nearest base-plug. "Oh boy! Look at that, will you! *Two* of 'em! What are they doing?" They were contesting electric-power rights and Peter went down on hands and knees to watch while the successful one recharged: he was fascinated. When the wheely was through it started away across the rug and Peter put out his hand, but it made a detour and went rapidly through the open French window.

"Damn!" Callahan said, and started after it.

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"Why, it's just like it was alive!" Peter said delightedly, as he followed Callahan out onto the terrace. "Did you see the way it *dodged*? How did it see my hand, Mr. Callahan?"

"Photoelectric scanners. And they're not alive, Peter, but they might just as well be . . . Oh, for Pete's sakes!" The wheely had crossed the lawn and was now on the cement apron of their small swimming pool. He began to run, but too late—the wheely, without a moment's hesitation, ran over the edge and disappeared with a faint splash. When they got there they could see it lying motionless on the blue tile bottom.

"Gee! It's drowned!"

"No, it's just shorted itself—it'll be all right when it dries out."

"Gee, aren't you going to get it out? Want *me* to, Mr. Callahan?" Peter was already pulling off his T-shirt.

"Sure," Callahan began, and Amantha appeared at the French windows.

"You've blown the fuse!" she called out. "My typewriter's off!"

"No, I haven't," he muttered distractedly, and walked back to the house. As he went in he heard Peter dive. When he looked in the fuse box he found the one for the rear section blown—there was a smell of hot oil in the air. After a short search he discovered the cause: a wheely—not Thirteen, he was oddly relieved to see—was in a corner behind some boxes with smoke coming from it. It had evidently found some thin nails and thrust them behind the guard that covered a floor-plug, and the full voltage had gone through the grapplers and shorted in the graphite-gel.

He picked it up—and dropped it hurriedly: it was still hot. Well, now there were seven wheelies left—numbers one to six were experimental and had been scrapped. All the current models had a built-in response to any weakening in their batteries, which made them immediately seek out a base-plug and recharge, and he had found it advantageous to keep their batteries small so that they would be forced into frequent repetitions of the action. It was the equivalent of seeking food, and he hoped it would lead to a kind of survival of the fittest—not as between one wheely and another, but of the more useful engrams.

These in turn were the result of some enduring change produced in the cortex by previous activity—a form of memory. The wheely encountering the problems imposed by its environment would learn, and the problems, as R. W. Gerard had put it in reference to the living cerebrum, somehow whip into existence a brain capable of solving them. Callahan's thoughts were interrupted by Peter, who came into the lab,

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dripping and wearing nothing but shorts. He held out the wheely—also wet. "Think it'll be all right, Mr. Callahan?"

"Sure. Thanks a lot, Peter," Callahan said. "You'd better go on home and get into dry clothes." He put the wheely on the bench. Amantha came to the door to let him know the current was on again. He decided to take the blame for its interruption.

After Peter had been sent home to change, the rescued wheely began to make jerky, indecisive movements as its servo-circuits dried, and Callahan put it on the floor. Amantha and he followed it as it went into the living room and had another try at the French windows—now shut. "Let's have an experiment," Callahan said, and picked it up and put it on the dinner table. It rolled to the edge, where it stopped—its scanners directed at the void. "See! It's learned from one lesson—that's amazing!"

"Number Thirteen, again," Amantha said. "I tell you, Callahan, he's the clever one." For once Callahan was inclined to agree with her. "What time's your symposium to be at?" she asked.

"We're having the dinner first—that starts at seven. The yapping afterwards will probably keep up till all hours, so I'll put up at a hotel. I'll be back for lunch—don't forget to shut off the base-plugs, Amantha."

"I'll not. You better go pack your bag if you have to find a hotel: it's a four-hour drive, so you'd best leave here at two."

"Right. I'm going to take Thirteen with me for the demonstration."

"Well, keep him out of mischief."

Callahan had a special carrier for the wheelies—it allowed a certain freedom of movement so that they would not get the "dithers"—but when the time came he could not find Thirteen anywhere.

"D'you think he's maybe crawled in behind the books in the living room?" Amantha said, after they had searched fruitlessly.

"There isn't room enough," Callahan said. "This is damned annoying, but I can't wait—I'll take Nine instead. Damn: I wanted to show them how Thirteen avoids the edge of the table!"

"Maybe he told Nine to watch out for edges."

"Oh, for Pete's sakes, Amantha! They can't *communicate!*"

"Well, I'll keep an eye out for Thirteen. Perhaps he'll communicate his whereabouts."

Callahan nodded and went in search of Nine. The disappearance of his star wheely was unprecedented—none of them had ever hidden before. It occurred to him that it might have gotten out-

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side, but all the doors and window screens were secure. It was very puzzling. Just before he left, he said, "If I were you I'd pull that switch early. In fact right now—otherwise you'll have to keep an eye on them all afternoon. They'll run out of juice by four if you do it now, and you'll have a little peace and quiet."

"I'll do that," she said, and kissed him goodbye. He went to the garage to get out the little coupe they used for long trips, but there was no response to the starter switch. He had no time to check the battery or wiring, so he took the jeep. In ten minutes he had forgotten the matter.

The symposium got off to a fair start: Callahan's report on the progress of his experiments was greeted with enthusiastic interest by everyone except Underwood, who interrupted constantly. He seemed incapable of grasping the concept of a flexible, self-teaching, practically self-creating cortex, and acted as if Callahan were withholding pertinent information. This was the moment Callahan had been waiting for. He beckoned to the waiter, who brought in the wheely carrier. He put it down gingerly—the faint scrambling from inside was disconcerting, but since this was a group of scientists he was ready for anything. Callahan thanked him, took out Nine and put it on the table. "Here, Gentlemen, is one of them," he said. "It's not my most highly developed one, but—"

"How come you didn't bring *that?*" Underwood interrupted.

"I intended to, but I . . . er, couldn't find it."

"Couldn't *find* it?"

"Well, you see . . . it had hidden."

Underwood sneered. "And I suppose this one will be unable to prove your rather extraordinary claims," he said. "Hidden!"

"All right, Underwood," another member said. "Let's see what it can do." He reached out his hand, which Nine examined with its scanners. Then it backed away and scooted to the edge of the table—and came to an abrupt stop. "I'll be damned!" the man said, admiringly. Callahan felt the same way—it almost looked as though Amantha had been right.

"I think," Underwood said, "that anyone who is familiar with Dr. Monkton's photoelectric 'cat' which follows and catches an illuminated 'mouse,' will not find this either novel or impressive."

"Yes, but the table edge is not illuminated," the other man said.

"When I was a boy," Underwood said, loftily, "I had a mechanical toy that never fell off a table. It had feelers resting on the board which dropped when it came to an edge, causing the mechanism to turn."

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"This one wasn't using its feelers," Callahan said. "It's learned to recognize the cortical image of an open space. Here: I'll show you." He put Nine on the floor and got the members to make a ring with their legs close together, but leaving a narrow gateway.

Nine scanned the fence of legs, and evidently decided they were too closely spaced to get through. When it spotted the gate, it made for it, but just before going through it, it made a detour and untied one of Underwood's shoelaces. Then it dashed out of the gateway. The members laughed, and one of them said, "Very cute!" but Underwood did not seem to share this view.

"All it did," he said, as he tied his shoe, "was to register the light area and go toward it. Mere phototropism." He did not mention shoelaces.

"Well, if you think so, we can try something else," Callahan said, and went to retrieve the wheely. It was slowly rolling parallel to the baseboard, and he realized that its battery was weakening, and it was looking for an outlet. He explained this to the others, and they watched as it located one, and tried to remove the plugged-in cord, but it was stuck. After yanking unsuccessfully it gave up and came back to the table under which lay a knife that had been dropped. It was obvious that it had seen and remembered it, for it went directly back to the outlet again, and using the knife as a lever, pried the plug loose. Then it calmly recharged itself. Even Underwood was impressed. But Callahan was a little worried . . .

He was dog-tired when he got back to the hotel, and didn't wake up until the following noon. He tried to reach Amantha by phone to say he would be late, but there was no answer. Where on earth was she? He was expected for lunch; she ought to be home.

He drove up-state at top speed and made the trip in a little over three hours. He left the car in the drive and went to the door: it was locked. He called out and rang the bell, but nobody came. Then from inside the house he heard very faintly his wife's voice calling. To get in he had to break a pane of glass and, once inside, he could definitely hear Amantha at the back. He ran down the passageway to the lab—also locked—and her voice came from inside, but curiously muffled. He lunged and broke the lock, knocking over a pile of books, and now her voice was over him: "Get me *out* of here, Callahan!"

"For Heaven's sake, where are you?"

"I'm up in the attic, entirely!"

"But there isn't any attic, Amantha!"

"Well, just the same, that's where I am!"

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It dawned on him that there was an air space—with ventilating louvers at either end, and accessible by a trap door set in the lab ceiling directly over the bench. He now saw that a crate had been placed on this, and a chair on the crate. The trap door had a spring catch, which explained why Amantha was emprisoned. "Just a minute!" he shouted, and climbed onto the bench. He was about to mount the chair when he saw that one of the legs was not on the crate. Setting it straight he climbed up and unlocked the trap door. Amantha was covered with dust and spider web. Her eyes were blazing.

"My God!" she said. "Just wait till I lay hands on that Thirteen! I'll *dook* him! I'll decontaminate him!"

"Now, calm down, Amantha, and tell me what happened. What on earth were you doing up there?"

"I was lured, is what!" she said indignantly. "Out of the goodness of my heart I was trying to help that misbegotten, deceitful contraption, and all the time it was fooling! It's become the ringleader, Callahan, and that's no lie!"

"Look: let's begin at the beginning," he said. "Did you turn off the base-plugs early, the way I said?"

"Well, to tell you the truth I didn't like to do it. They wanted to play—it seemed a shame to make them go to bed at four, surely."

"But did you *eventually* turn off the juice?"

"Wait till I catch my breath, will you? I've been shouting up in here since who knows, but I couldn't make anyone hear. The Browns must be out. Well, I turned it off, but they're getting it somewhere on the Q.T. It all comes from when they discovered the keyhole saw: Thirteen cut a hole in the floor into the crawlspace and they've been gallivanting all over the house under it!" She pointed to a jagged hole near the door. "He's got one in every room and doors won't hold 'em. And they've got a new way of climbing: they pull themselves up with a bit of bent wire. That's how I got locked in."

"I thought you said you were lured?"

"And so I was. Thirteen gets up there somehow, and starts going tip-tap, tip-tap. I came to see what's up and think he's got himself caught, so I pile up the crate and the chair and climb up with merciful intentions—and Thirteen skitters past me and drops on the chair and bang! I'm in!"

"It's a lucky thing you weren't able to follow," Callahan said. "The chair had one leg off the edge and you'd have taken a tumble—over there." He pointed, and saw for the first time the bottom

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of a broken bottle standing, jagged points up, on the floor where she would have fallen if she had stepped on the insecure chair. "You say Thirteen dropped onto it?" She nodded, looking at the broken bottle incredulously. "They weigh over seven pounds, Amantha, and the way the chair was placed when I came in, Thirteen would have knocked it over. No: it *moved* it."

There was a silence. Callahan shook his head—the whole thing was preposterous. The experiment was working too well. The wheelies' speed of mental developement would do credit to a human brain. There was not a wheely in sight. "Where the devil are they all?" he said.

"They're all under the house conferring what to do next."

"You know what, Amantha?"

"No," she said. "My mind's a total blank."

"That's where they're getting recharged! They've tapped a B-X cable under the floor—God knows how—and I don't know how to stop them unless I throw the main switch . . ."

"What'd we do for light?"

"If I do it now, they'll be deactivated in a couple of hours. We won't be needing the lights till this evening."

"I'm having myself an egg and whisky," Amantha said. "I'm dead altogether. How would they know about the BX cable, Callahan?"

"They must detect it by electromagnetic induction . . . a new sense!" He looked around and noticed that various things were missing: pliers, a wire-cutter, a spool of flex—as well as the keyhole saw and an auger to start it. There was a slight noise and the scanners of a wheely appeared in the hole. On seeing Callahan it sank out of sight again, and they heard it land on the cement floor of the crawlspace. Callahan went to the fuse box and pulled the main switch. Amantha went out to the kitchen, and shortly afterwards called to him from the garden.

"Will you look at that?" she said when he joined her. There was a pile of fresh earth and beside it a small hole in the ground, big enough for a woodchuck—but there had never been signs of one before . . .

"They've learned how to dig," she said. "The hellers."

"You know what that means, don't you? They'll be able to get at the power company's main out at the road. The line isn't on poles any more—they've got it underground, and my turning off our main switch won't do any good! It's going to be a race against time: if they can't make it in two hours they'll run out of juice. Otherwise . . ." He looked at his watch. "It's ten of five—by seven we'll know the worst."

"I think you ought to go down

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there in the crawl-space, now," Amantha said. "And have it out with them. You can get in by the little door in the closet. Tell me first; why did you take the jeep yesterday?"

"The battery's dead—I'm glad you reminded me. I'll go and check it . . ."

He went to the garage, but he was not able to check the battery because it wasn't in the car. He went back and told Amantha the news. "They've got it under the house, of course! They've apparently worked out a way of bypassing their transformers and charge direct from the battery voltage—it's just right for *their* batteries! I'll fix their wagon *now!*"

He took a flash and went to the closet where the access door to the crawl-space was, but it was immovable. He fetched a screwdriver and removed the hinges—the door had been barricaded with some scrap lumber. In the low-ceilinged space he found the battery from the coupe, and some of the missing tools, but no wheelies. At one point a cinder block had been dislodged from the foundations by scratching away the mortar from around it, and next the hole it left was another pile of dirt. As Callahan watched, an additional small amount was flung out, almost getting him in the face. A wheely's scanners appeared—then it turned and scuttled away into the tunnel.

"They've dug a tunnel, all right," Callahan said when he emerged from the closet. He held out the battery and the keyhole saw. "Without these I think they'll leave us in peace for tonight. I don't think they've tapped the main yet—they had the battery, and I'm going to bottle 'em up." He went to the garage and returned with a thirty-pound flagstone which was meant for a new walk, and put it on the wheely-hole in the livingroom. It was far too heavy for them to lift, and he covered the other holes the same way.

The next morning was hot and overcast, and when Amantha went to the kitchen to make breakfast she found the icebox not running, and the toaster wouldn't work. "The lights are all off!" she told Callahan when he arrived.

"That does it!" he said. "They've cut our lead-in—they've got all the power they want! I'll have to call the company . . ." He went to the phone, and the company promised to send a man out right away. He went under the house, but there were no wheelies in sight—they must still be in their tunnel, he thought, and wondered how fast they could dig. Peter came in after breakfast.

"Hello," he said cheerfully. "All our lights are off! I looked at the fuses, but they're okay."

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"*Yours* too?"

"Yes. Mother called the company, but they haven't gotten here yet. And say, Mr. Callahan, one of your little machines was out by the road! It went and hid when it saw me—in a woodchuck hole. It's a new one—there's a pile of fresh earth, and another one on our lawn. I didn't know there were any woodchucks around here, Mr. Callahan."

"Neither did I." Callahan heard Amantha coming down the hall, and swear as she tried unsuccessfully to turn on a light. She appeared at the door, looking distracted.

"When did they say the man'd be here?" she said. "We're *dooked!* Oh," she caught sight of Peter. "*Sarishan,* Peter, *miri pal!* Now, suppose you *jaw tasaulore* to your *di,* like a good *chavvy.*" Under duress she was inclined to revert to Gypsy speech. Peter enjoyed this, though he didn't understand more than its drift. "I suppose the wheelies are still in that tunnel of theirs, *rakkering* away—"

"I keep telling you they can't talk, Amantha!" Callahan said.

"Is there a tunnel here?" Peter was greatly intrigued.

"'Tis not one you could crawl into, rightly. The little fellows made it, so run along with you."

"Here's the repair man," Callahan said, "so scram, will you, Peter?"

Reluctantly Peter left, and they saw him cross the lawn and stop to talk with the man who got out of the service truck. Some time later, after trying unsuccessfully to locate the break in their line, the repair man said to Callahan, "We'll have to get a crew here to dig up the road. The people next door are in the same fix—a disconnected lead-in. It's not in the main or this whole sector'd be out. I don't get it . . . Say:" He looked speculatively at Callahan. "The kid says you've got some kind of a machine that digs into the ground—maybe that's what's causing the trouble!" He looked severe—company property must never be tampered with. "I gotta go, now. You better watch what you do with that machine of yours. The crew'll be over later and dig up the road. There's no manhole for a couple of hundred feet." Shaking his head disapprovingly, he left. In a few moments his truck snorted and whisked out onto the road.

Callahan returned to the lab where he tried to work. There was no sign of wheely activity, which he found more ominous and distracting than their busy presence. Thunder rumbled in the distance, but the storm held off, and after lunch a truck drove up and a team of men started digging up the road.

Callahan went out after a while and found they had made a

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long trench uncovering the main. Another group was performing a similar task at the Browns'. "You can try your lights, now, Mister," the foreman said. "We found the break. There was a dead short next the main—looked like a rat chewed it." He looked accusingly at Callahan. "Jones said you had some kind of digging machine—is it one of them rotary sewer cleaners? Because you ought to know better'n to go making holes under the sidewalks!"

"No, no. He misunderstood. The kid next door was telling—"

"Hey, Willis!" One of the work crew was looking at a portable meter thoughtfully. "There's a big drop in potential, still. There must be another short around here. It's not the one next door—they fixed it."

"There's rat holes running all over," a second man said.

"Them ain't rats," the first man said. "They're too big."

Callahan left them discussing the problem, and went back to the house where he tried the lights. They glowed a dim orange—there was obviously a bad power leak in the vicinity.

"Will it run the icebox, Callahan?" Amantha asked.

"I doubt it."

"I say we pack up and take the week off in New York. It'll be a holiday for us and the wheelies. Maybe they'll come to their senses . . ."

"I can't just go away, Amantha, and leave them on the loose! And stealing power whenever they want it, damn it."

The point was argued at dinner, and afterwards Callahan turned on their portable radio, as the T-V wouldn't operate on the reduced current. They listened to the news, interrupted by static from the distant lightning. When the local news came on they learned that their village had had an insignificant but perplexing robbery.

The big hardware store on Main Street had been entered and a number of items were gone, but the owner who had gone back there after dinner claimed that no one had broken in, and the lock had not been forced. He had the only key. The local police were puzzled, and the announcer thought it was very droll. Callahan glanced at Amantha—she seemed to think it was all very droll, too.

"You've just got to admit that they're terribly industrious," she said.

"But it *can't* be the wheelies! Why, Main Street's three or four blocks from here!"

The single lamp they had left on as an indicator winked and brightened to full strength. "Glory be, they've fixed it," Amantha said. "I'll go turn on the icebox."

She stood up and started

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for the door. "There's Thirteen!" she cried. "No—he's gone! Into the lab . . ."

Callahan hurried in pursuit, wondering how Thirteen had managed to move the heavy flagstone, but arrived too late. Thirteen was out of sight. Entrance had been gained by the simple method of cutting a new hole in the floor—they had got themselves another keyhole saw.

Callahan went back and they watched TV.

During the next few days he saw no more of the wheelies, and he had abandoned all idea of recovering them by digging, as things—or rather, the wheelies—had gone too far for that. He installed a readily accessible electrical outlet in the crawl-space next to the mouth of their tunnel as a lure, and an alarm system that would ring in the bedroom if it were used. In front of the tunnel itself he arranged a form of portcullis that would trap anything that came through. There was no sound from the alarm that night and the next morning he went down-under to check the trap. It had been propped open and the alarm disconnected.

"I'm worried," he told Amantha. "They're getting too damn smart—if the cops get on to this I may be held responsible for the thefts at the hardware store, and damage to the power line."

"Can't you disown them, Callahan? They're not rightly children, so you could put a notice in the paper: the wheelies've left my bed and board."

"That wouldn't do any good. It's like leaving your car on a hill—the breaks fail and it runs downhill and kills someone."

"They're too weak to harm a soul, surely?"

"Not if they act cooperatively—they might take it into their cortex boxes to do us in." This was the day the news of the second robbery came over the air—small metal-working tools taken, but the cash untouched, to the perplexity of the police. And a tunnel was discovered under the showroom but it was too small for a man to get through, and everyone was at a loss.

"I wish I'd never made the blasted things!" he said to Amantha.

"I expect that's what Frankenstein said," she remarked.

Callahan had uneasy dreams that night, and woke sweating shortly before dawn. He was totally unable to move, and since he couldn't reach the light, he couldn't see what was holding him. He called out to Amantha.

"I'm here," she said. "I'm wrapped up in a cocoon, so get me out!"

Dawn came through the windows before Callahan was able to wriggle free. He was held down

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like Gulliver by the Lilliputian army—yards and yards of string had been wound around the bed, and he was breathing heavily when he finally got loose and cut Amantha's bindings. Something nagged at his mind—some noise out of the nightmare—and he went directly to the lab. It was a shambles: everything pertaining to the construction of wheelies had been spirited away, including his entire supply of graphite-gel.

In the afternoon news came that a small " mechanized object" had been seen carrying a Stillson wrench in a vacant lot, and a fast-moving boy had nabbed it before it could get away. Nobody could make head or tail of it. It had run out of power shortly after capture, and a garage mechanic was called in to take it apart and see what it was. He could make nothing of the inner workings beyond the servo-motors and the photoelectric scanners, and it ended up in the lost-and-found items. Callahan debated admitting ownership, but was reluctant to do so. He felt it might not be traced to him if he kept quiet, but he didn't bargain for Peter. Peter came over immediately after the broadcast. "Hey, Mr. Callahan!" he said excitedly. "The radio says they found one of your machines in the village! It's at the police station—aren't you going for it?"

"I guess so, Peter," Callahan said.

At the station house they were expecting him—Jones, the repair man, was there. He had put two and two together, and given them a modified version of Peter's original account, but to Callahan's relief, no connection had been made with the thefts. Jones made some remarks about short circuits in the company lines, but the police weren't interested. The wheelies were apparently now getting their power without any detectable line-loss. Then Callahan noticed that the inert wheely on the sergeant's desk had no number plate. He bent for a closer look, and his scalp crawled—there were no screw holes for attaching it.

He had not made this wheely . . .

He mumbled thanks, left a five dollar bill for the youthful finder, and drove home with his mind whirling. Amantha met him in the hall.

" 'Twas Thirteen, I bet," she said.

He shook his head and explained, and they went into the lab. He took the little mechanism apart—it was almost identical with the ones he had made himself. Amantha looked at him wide-eyed. "D'you think *they* made it, Callahan?"

"I . . . I don't know . . ."

"I say now's the time to pack off for New York."

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"We *can't*. This is serious, Amantha," he said. "I'll *have* to tell . . . to warn people: Lord knows what they'll do next!"

He reached up to turn on the overhead light to make a closer examination—and was felled like a pine.

When he came to, Amantha was bending over him with a white face. He had pins-and-needles in his right arm and a nasty burn on his fingers.

"What was it, Callahan, dear?"

"Six hundred volts, by the feel of it." His eyes went up past her face, and saw the new wire that ran across the ceiling and connected with the switch chain. This would seem to be a declaration of war!"

There were footsteps, and Peter's voice said, "Hey! What happened?"

"I fell over my foot, Peter," Callahan said, and got up.

"Oh. Well, I was going to tell you, there's two more holes with piles of dirt—one's in the pasture in back, and the other's just inside the woods beyond. Did you go for your little machine, Mr. Callahan?"

"Yes," Callahan said, getting suddenly interested in Peter's information. "Thanks for telling me. Now, d'you mind running along? I've got work to do." He didn't want Peter tagging along on his proposed exploration: he would be in the way—worse, he might be in actual danger. He would have trouble enough in keeping Amantha from coming.

"Well, I just thought I'd tell you," Peter said, and slowly left them. Callahan watched through the window as he crossed the lawn, then he turned to Amantha and said with unconvincing casualness, "Think I'll stroll over and take a gander at the new holes . . ."

"We'll do that," she said, firmly.

Callahan started to object, but gave up. "Well, stay close, will you?"

"I'll be close, because we'll take the jeep," she said.

"Why on earth?"

"There's an old trail through there you can get on from the lane beyond Jessica Brown's house. 'Tis wide enough for the jeep, and besides it's all brambles behind here—it'd ruin my nylons."

Callahan looked at his watch. "It's getting late," he said, "and it may storm. I'll go tomorrow—anyway, isn't it time to fix dinner?"

"Dinner's fixed and it's in a slow oven," she said. "Come on: I want to see if there's any more of their little tunnels in the wood. I bet that's where they've got their factory!"

Callahan shrugged. It all sounded like Snow White and

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the Seven Wheelies—only there might be a lot more than seven by now.

They drove the jeep up the branch road and turned into a bumpy, but not impassable lane that meandered among the trees. After a while they stopped and got out at a point that Callahan judged to be in a line with their house. Almost at once they found a pile of fresh earth, with its accompanying ten-inch hole, and, deeper into the woods, another.

"What would that be?" Amantha said. She was pointing ahead, and he saw a new pile of earth—not something the size of a molehill, but enough to make a load for a small truck. When they got to it they found a ragged hole six feet across. Callahan peered down into it—it was on the side of a rise in the ground, and went down on a declivity into the darkness. Lying scattered about the opening were a dozen or so wheelies—several without number plates—and they had all been mashed flat.

"Great guns!" Callahan said. "Somebody got here ahead of us! Who in—"

"The poor little flattened-out things!" Amantha said.

"Callahan was looking around—a wide trail of crushed branches and broken saplings led off among the trees. "Someone's driven a half-track in here and dug up their hideaway," he said. "Who in hell can it have been?"

"What makes you think they dug their way *in*, Callahan? It looks more to me as if they'd dug their way *out!*"

He looked again at the way the earth had been thrust aside, and decided she was right . . . Amantha nudged him. "Whatever it was, it only just came out," she said. "I just saw a twig straighten itself up. Over there:" She pointed at the trail of destruction, and they went over to it. Callahan noticed a worm struggling to burrow back into the newly-turned earth. Amantha's remark about Frankenstein came back to him—what if after killing its maker, the monster made *another* monster—which in turn killed it?

"I don't like this, Callahan," Amantha said.

"Neither do I."

"No, but I mean the way it took. It's leading to our house . . ." She pointed again. "D'you think that if a lot of them were to travel in a bunch they might leave a trail like this, Callahan?"

"I do not. And they'd have come out of their burrow one at a time: not leaving a huge hole. Go and get in the jeep, Amantha—I'm going to follow the trail and see where it leads."

"I'm coming," she said. "The hell with my nylons!"

When they came to the pasture

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behind their house they lost the trail. Beyond the edge of the woods no mark was left on the dry ground. It was getting dark, and the lowering sun was obscured by threatening thunderheads. In the distance beside their house something small whisked out of sight.

"Did you see that?" Amantha said. "They're not all killed!"

"I know it. Only two of the kill— I mean destroyed ones had number plates . . . But where's *it* got to?"

"Oh, my stew! I should be putting the wine in it!"

"Never mind the stew—where did it *go*?"

"Behind the garage, the moment it saw us."

"I mean the . . . thing that crushed the wheelies."

"That was clumsiness, most likely."

"I'd like to believe it!"

"You forgot the jeep—I think it's going to rain and lightning."

"Damn the jeep! Come on!" They crossed the field and approached the house from the back. Everything was quiet as they went in by the kitchen, and Amnatha took the stew out of the oven and put a glass of Burgundy in it.

"I don't think the big chap's been here," she said, replacing the stew. "Why would he come? It's not his home." Callahan was looking out the door.

"Amantha! Come here—you were right about them communicating!"

She joined him and saw a row of four wheelies in single file come to a halt, and another one line itself up parallel to them. After a moment the four went on their way and the single one disappeared into a hole.

"I didn't see him wave or anything," Amantha said.

"It was induction," Callahan said. There was a rumble of thunder.

"Will you go and close the windows?" she said. "I'm getting my notebook. I left it out on the porch."

"I wish you—" Callahan started, but she was already outside. He went down the corridor towards the livingroom and was about to go in when he saw a faint bluish light in the room, and realized the television had been turned on and the venetian blinds drawn. It occurred to him that Peter might have come over to watch their set, and he called out, but there was no answer. From the doorway he looked around the room but could see nothing out of the ordinary. A sense of caution prompted him to turn on a light before going in, and he was about to do so when something about the wall switch caught his eye, and he peered at it in the bad light without touching it.

Attached to the wall with fric-

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tion tape was the upper end of a piece of flex that stretched across the floor from behind the T-V set. The two bare wires projected in front of the switch. He remembered that a TV transformer produces fifteen thousand volts, and backed away. The trick with the overhead light had been improved.

The phone in the hall rang and he went to answer it. It was Jessica Brown. "Have you seen Peter?" she said.

"No, I haven't."

"Well, if you do will you tell him to come right home? It's going to rain." He hung up and wondered why Amantha was taking so long getting her notebook. He looked out through the open front door, and saw her coming across the lawn with some letters in her hand. He realized they had forgotten to go to the mailbox that morning. She smiled happily and waved an open letter when she saw him at the door.

"Hey!" she called out. "I've sold my book to—" Then she was gone, a section of turf disappearing with her, into a gaping hole in the lawn. Callahan started forward, and something thin and cold wrapped itself around his neck, and he was dragged back into the house. Then he was struck a heavy blow on the head, and he blacked out.

Callahan's first emotion when he came to, was anger at himself. He was lying on the floor in the small room where the closet was that led to the crawl-space. The closet was open, as were the doors to the room. One of these led to the main hall and the other to his lab, where he could see the corner of the work bench and the fuse box on the wall beyond it. Thunder was rumbling continuously, and there was a smell of burned stew in the air.

He got to his feet and found that his head was surprisingly not aching—in retrospect he realized that it had in all probability hit the side of the front door. The thing that had pulled him back into the house had not meant to strike him. If it was what he suspected, it would have left him for dead—or thought his battery had run out.

As his mind cleared he remembered Amantha, and started forward, but even before he got to the door he heard her cry out—"Callahan! Callahan!" in an agonized voice.

When he saw her his mind froze. She was at the far end of the hall, face down on the floor, with her wrists and ankles bound together behind her with flex. And between him and her was the thing that the wheelies had made—in their own image, but with certain improvements.

It had not two but four grappling arms, and he could see that it did not intend to run out of

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power, for a length of wire ran from a wall outlet to a reel attached to its side-plates, a reel that kept the wire from tangling. But now that he saw it in actuality, it was its size that appalled him: it was six feet long at least. . . . It also had an extra scanner, which was directed backwards, and this saw him the moment he started forward. The giant wheely immediately turned and came toward him, and Callahan saw that it held outstretched the bare end of a heavy insulated cable—the rest of which ran back through the door to the living room, and, he was sure, the TV set and its fifteen thousand volts. One touch from the cable would be death.

He dashed back into the small room, which led to the lab and in turn to the hall—and Amantha. But as soon as he got to the door to the lab he saw that the giant had anticipated him. This was going to be tough: the thing was possibly as intelligent as he was. It was now advancing on him again, but as Callahan backed away to escape electrocution, it itself turned, and he realized that it knew that if he got to Amantha first and freed her, he and she could escape through the front door. On regaining the hall he saw that once more the giant was between him and his wife—if only he could get back to the lab in time, and to the fuse box, he could pull the switch and thus cut off the current to the TV set.

He edged back through the door and ran, but too late: the giant was there ahead of him. It seemed to be a stalemate; if he went to save Amantha he would be killed and she would be too. He could not outlast the giant as it had unlimited power on tap, whereas he would eventually tire. If he escaped to save himself she would be killed.

He thought of the telephone, but it was beyond the great wheely and its cable of death. Shouting would do no good either—for one thing the thunder was now so loud and continuous that he would never be heard, even if anyone came near enough.

But what was preventing the giant from immediately electrocuting Amantha? Did it realize that if she were killed nothing would stand between him and escape—that the only thing that held him there was the threat of *her* death! It seemed incredible, but it was the only explanation of its action. The thing *was* as rational as he was!

Amantha had managed to turn over on her back, and was in a half-sitting position, watching the giant with a chalk-white face. "Get out the back way, Callahan!" she cried. "Quick, or it'll do you in!"

There was a loud crack of nearby lightning and the beat of rain

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increased. The bluish glow from the TV set dimmed momentarily, and Callahan prayed that there might be an interruption in the power, but his hopes faded as he remembered that with the new underground cable this was unlikely.

"Lie still, Amantha!" he called back to her. "I'll think of something!"

"Well, think hard, *miri rom!* I fell through into a cave and the little ones tied me up before I could gather my wits—then the big chap brought me up through the crawl-space. What's that he's holding?"

"It's . . ." Callahan began, but stopped. Why frighten her more?

The great wheely started to roll very slowly towards him again, and he backed into the doorway of the little room—and at once came out. But the wheely had not been fooled—it was still coming. Once more he backed, only this time he kept going . . . and the wheely was waiting for him by the fuse box. It was not to be taken in by a thing so elementary as a double feint. Callahan felt that there was something in Game Theory that might help—if he could think of it. But the giant probably knew it, or would work it out without hesitation. Was there such a thing as a triple feint?

He turned and ran back towards the hall, and then immediately back: the wheely had not budged. He was desperate—the thing could out-think him no matter what he did. And what was a triple feint after all but a single one by another name? It was like playing odd-and-even, but with some superrational being.

Already he was beginning to tire, and with a side compartment of his mind he wondered where the little wheelies were. In retrospect they seemed very harmless . . . yet they had made this monster of rationality. If only there were some way to make a temporary barrier that would hold it back, if only for a minute—then he could get to Amantha, or the switch: either would do. But the only key was to their bedroom, and there was no way to jam or block the other doors. The room with the closet had no movable furniture except a flimsy chair, and there was nothing in the hall that he could get to ahead of the giant, which would unquestionably deduce his maneuver at once.

Perhaps there was something in the kitchen . . . no, the giant would merely go back and guard the switch, and Amantha. Could he not then get as far as the door to the living room—not to go in, for he would be bottled up and the wheely could kill him there before he could get to the window and escape—but long

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enough to yank the cable loose from the TV set? It was worth a try: but then he remembered that his reasoning about being bottled up was cockeyed because the wheely would be unable to kill him if, instead of trying for the window, he merely turned off the TV switch. But how could he be sure that the switch was still operative?

It was too big a gamble—he would have to try pulling the cable loose, and if that failed, he would at least not be trapped in a cul-de-sac. They'd merely be back where they started.

The giant was at the moment out of sight, at a point half-way between Amantha and the fuse box in the lab, and Callahan tiptoed into the hall. Not that the giant could hear him—but for all he knew it could interpret vibrations in the floor. He waited, and in a few moments a scanner appeared at the far door to the hall. The giant would of course have to keep up a constant sentry duty to guard both lines of approach. The door to the living room was nearer to him than to the giant, but was the difference great enough? Well, he'd give it a try.

He decided that a single feint would give him the optimum start, and backed quickly into the door and out again. The scanner was gone, and he raced for the cable. Just before reaching it, the giant came around the corner, and he grabbed and pulled—starting backwards as he did so. But it held fast: the giant had taken precautions. He dropped the cable—they were back again at a deadlock.

The rain was coming down in a loud torrent, intermittently accompanied by splitting thunder and brilliant flashes of lightning. Amantha was staring straight ahead of her, frightened, he suspected, for the first time in her life. She must have deduced from his actions that the cable was what prevented him from going to her at once. How could he think his way out of this ghastly game of chess? An idea began to form in his mind—but how was he going to get the time to put it into operation, in the face of perfect logic and flawless rationality?

Flawless? Maybe that was the giant's Achilles heel—something utterly *non*-rational might be beyond its powers of analysis! He checked over the plan: it might just possibly work, given a little luck, and he set his mind to the task of choosing the right red herring—it must not be too irrational or the giant would dismiss it as a vagary. A haze of greasy acrid smoke was beginning to come from the ruined stew in the kitchen, and he wondered if he could find something with the right degree of foolishness to do there to give the right effect—he was go-

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ing to have to go through the kitchen afterwards to achieve his ultimate purpose. But what? The door of the closet and, through it, the smaller one to the crawl-space caught his eye, and he realized he had the perfect solution.

He drew the giant away from the line of sight by going towards the hall. Then he went back, reached in and very quietly closed the little, inner door, and afterwards, the outer one—but slamming it hard enough to make sure its vibration would be felt. Then he dashed out and through the kitchen, where he grabbed a heavy cleaver—and out into the garden.

He was taking a terrible chance—he had not waited to see the success of his diversion—but he was gambling on the wheely puzzling over the closed door to the closet. It must reason that Callahan would be a complete fool to hide in there, for his chances of being caught were much greater, and yet it would have to investigate, and all this would take time.

Outside, next to the kitchen door was a ground-wire running down the side of the house from the lightning arrester on the television mast—and with a single blow of the cleaver he severed it. He was back in the house at once, and found that the giant had not bothered to open the closet door . . . but it *had* paused to determine the meaning of this absurd act, and now they were back in their original state of a stand-off.

But there was a difference—a hope, a faint chance that lightning would strike the aerial. It had before, but harmlessly because of the ground-wire, and being in this exposed position there was a fair possibility of its happening again. Certainly there had never been a storm like this in his memory—he had something to wait for now . . . perhaps. After all, the Empire State Building was struck many times in every electrical storm in the city—not necessarily a bolt that was visible to the eye, but a huge surge of potential that made the dials of the weather indicators jump.

No, he thought, I'm a fool—the gamble wasn't going to pay off. He would wait and wait, and the storm would go, and he would eventually become exhausted . . . and that would be it. From the far end of the hall he heard a curious chanting sound, and recognized his wife's voice.

He went and looked from the door, and saw Amantha sitting with her face raised—her eyes were closed and she had a look of withdrawn concentration. She was reciting something—in the Romany *jib*—and he wondered if she was praying . . . but he thought the Gypsies did not pray. It was getting darker, and already his knees were feeling weak from

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tension, and then it happened.

There was a premonitory hissing *CLICK,* and the whole house shook with the crash and glare of what must have been a direct hit on their TV mast. The blue light from the living room went out as the set was blown, and part of the charge jumped through the insulation of the cable, and sparks crackled around the giant wheely. It came to a halt and dropped the cable, smoke coming from its joints.

There was now a glow of red from the living room where the shock had started a fire, but Callahan went to Amantha first and rapidly undid the flex bindings. The giant was completely inert, and leaving Amantha rubbing her ankles and wrists, he ran to the kitchen and got a pail of water, which he took into the living room.

The flames were confined to the wooden case of the TV set, and after disconnecting it, he doused the fire.

A little while later he and Amantha were having a drink in the kitchen. The burned stew had been dumped and the windows opened to clear the smoke. They both felt a bit light-headed.

"I didn't have much more than a hope," he was saying. "But lightning comes in various sizes: sometimes it's no more than a sort of reverse brush-discharge and most people don't even know it's happened—unless they happen to get in the way. They come with fair frequency—especially if there's a conductor sticking up from a flat area, like our aerial. But we got the full treatment, or rather the big fellow did, and I don't think he can even be repaired. I guess," he looked a little embarrassed, "I was praying, the same as you—after I'd cut the ground-wire . . ."

"Yes," Amantha said, "I guessed that's what you were up to. But *I* wasn't praying, Callahan, dear."

"Then what were you reciting?"

She looked sly, and then shrugged and smiled. "Oh, *that.* That's a spell like. My mother taught it to me—it calls down the lightnings on your enemy . . . Well, I've *rakkered* enough." She got up briskly. "It'll take for ever to get the oven clean again. You'd better get the big chap out of the hall, Callahan."

He was looking at her with a thoughtful expression. Then he shook his head. "Say, that reminds me; where the hell are the little wheelies? I haven't seen them around. There were a few left when we—"

"Oh, they're all down in that cave of theirs—under the lawn. Peter's with them . . ."

"Great God!" Callahan said, starting for the door, "I must help—"

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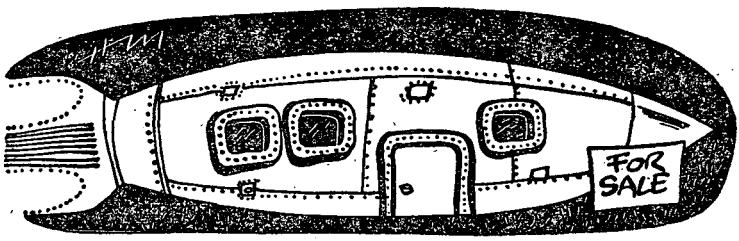
"Calm yourself, Callahan," Amantha said. "They left all the dirty work to the big chap. They're sitting round in a circle, watching."

"Watching what, in God's name?"

"Watching Peter and Thirteen playing checkers. When I got myself tied up and dragged out of there—and it happened so quick I couldn't get my breath to sing out—Peter was so absorbed he didn't turn his head. And no wonder: Thirteen was beating him, I bet!"



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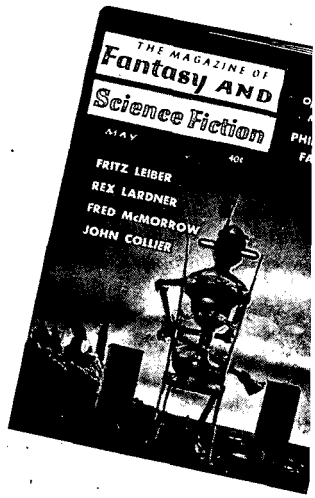

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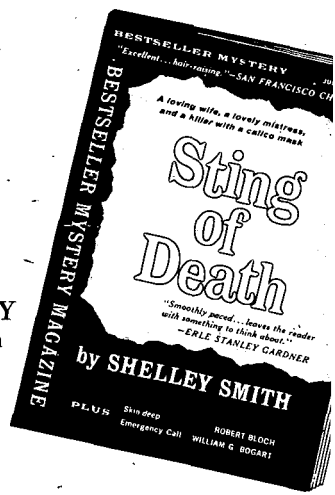

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